Weird Tales

June 1932

The Unique Magazine

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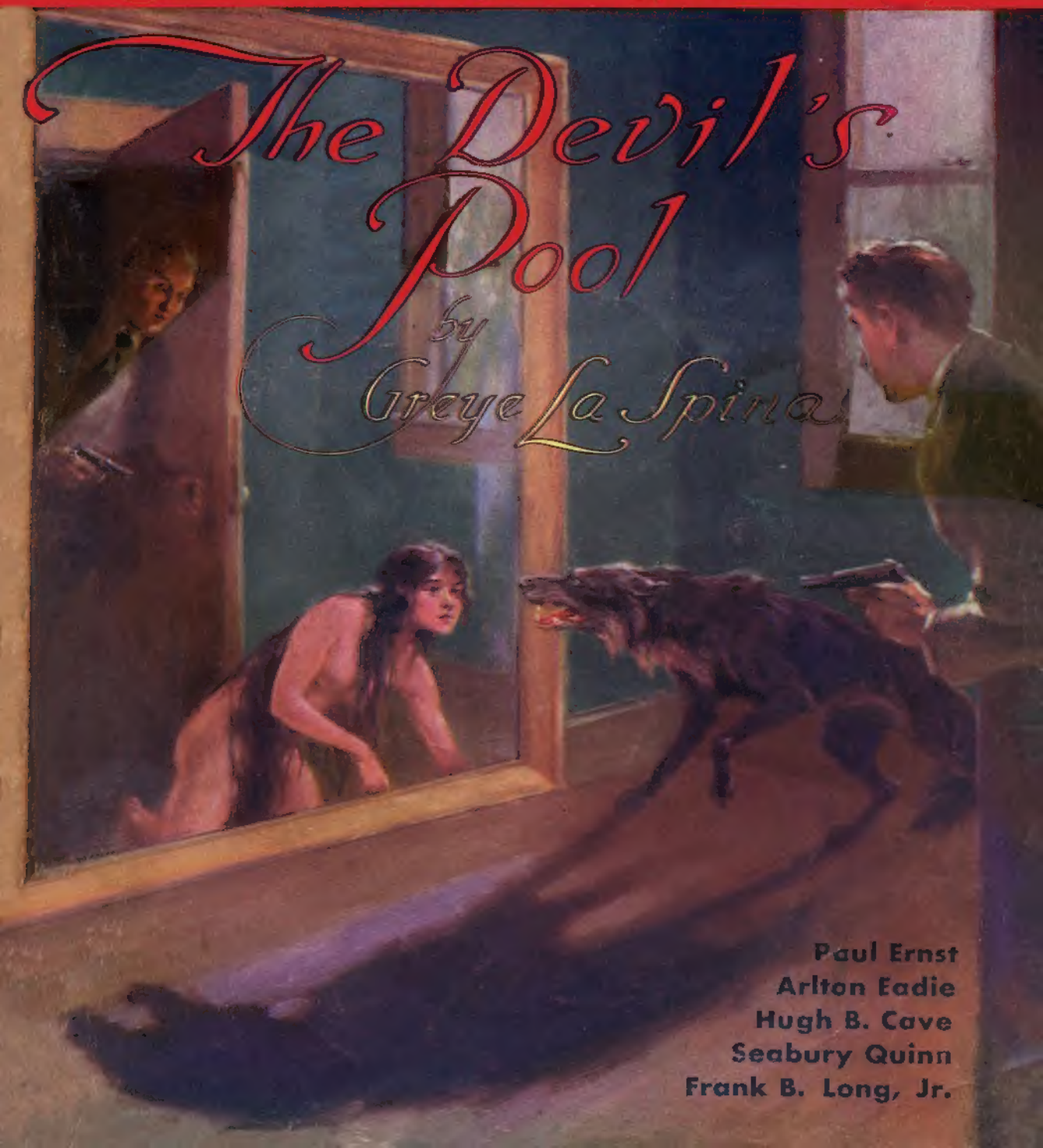

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIX NUMBER 6

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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A famous novel that for more than one hundred years has been acclaimed a masterpiece of weird horror

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THERE is much diversity of opinion among you, the readers, as to whether we should continue to print serials in our Weird Story Reprint department. We asked you, in the Eyrie of last month's WEIRD TALES, whether you wanted us to offer *Dracula* and other weird novels to you after *Frankenstein* is concluded. The consensus so far is that we should not print *Dracula,* because so many of our readers have already read this famous vampire novel by Bram Stoker; but the preponderance of letters received from you approves of our reprinting *Frankenstein.* The question is still open, and we will follow your wishes in this matter.

Leonard Geoghagan, of London, England, expresses the prevailing view in a letter to the Eyrie. "*The Wolf-Leader* by Alexandre Dumas was a thrilling and fascinating story," he writes, "and WEIRD TALES deserves my heartiest thanks for reprinting it. But *Dracula* is another matter, for most lovers of weird fiction are already acquainted with that novel. I say: If you can offer us any more weird novels such as *The Wolf-Leader,* which we can not obtain at the book stores, then by all means print them as weird story reprints. But thumbs down on *Dracula* and others of that ilk, for we have already read them."

Sophia Mundt, of Savannah, Georgia, writes to the Eyrie: "I am in favor of more serials in each issue, and longer stories. The weirder the stories are, the better I like them. I like ghost stories and stories of vampires and werewolves best of all."

"If you publish serials for your reprint department," writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago, "pick out those not so well known and those that are out of print. *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* can be obtained in any book store."

The same view is expressed by F. D. Arden, of Detroit, who writes: "It was with dismay that I read, in the April Eyrie, of your intention of using *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* as reprints in serial form. The only weak link in WEIRD TALES has been the reprints. For one thing, one serial is sufficient in an issue. If you reprint serials you will be carrying two continued stories; and as was the case with *The Wolf-Leader,* when the regular feature serial concludes and another begins, three serials will be in one issue. Too many serials. My suggestion is that instead of reprinting stories written in the Nineteenth Century, use only those taken from back numbers of WEIRD TALES."

A letter from Lester Anderson, of Hayward, California, says: "If you must have long serials, Stoker wrote other novels besides *Dracula,* and those novels are

(Please turn to page 859)

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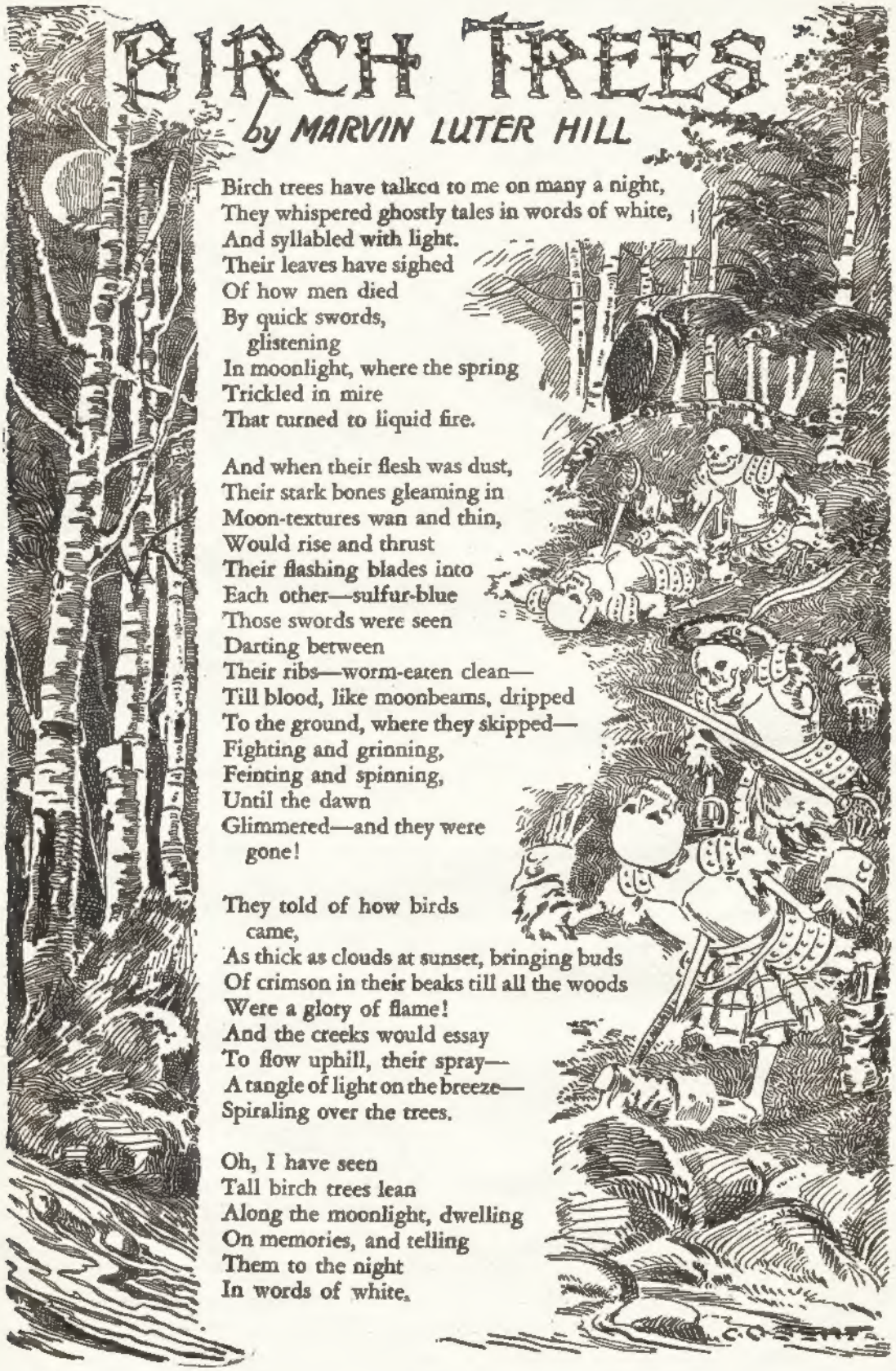
BIRCH TREES

by MARVIN LUTER HILL



Birch trees have talked to me on many a night,
They whispered ghostly tales in words of white,
And syllabled with light.
Their leaves have sighed
Of how men died
By quick swords,
glistening
In moonlight, where the spring
Trickled in mire
That turned to liquid fire.

And when their flesh was dust,
Their stark bones gleaming in
Moon-textures wan and thin,
Would rise and thrust
Their flashing blades into
Each other—sulfur-blue
Those swords were seen
Darting between
Their ribs—worm-eaten clean—
Till blood, like moonbeams, dripped
To the ground, where they skipped—
Fighting and grinning,
Feinting and spinning,
Until the dawn
Glimmered—and they were
gone!

They told of how birds
came,
As thick as clouds at sunset, bringing buds
Of crimson in their beaks till all the woods
Were a glory of flame!
And the creeks would essay
To flow uphill, their spray—
A tangle of light on the breeze—
Spiraling over the trees.

Oh, I have seen
Tall birch trees lean
Along the moonlight, dwelling
On memories, and telling
Them to the night
In words of white.

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This 279-page Book Tells —Here is a book worth its weight in gold to you if you stammer, stutter or have any speech trouble. It is a book fairly overflowing with the real, definite, tangible, hard-to-get facts about stammering. It is packed with priceless pointers that have never before appeared in print—tells dozens of things you have long wanted to know—tears away the veil of doubt, mystery and guesswork and reveals the plain truth about speech and its defects.

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- Can Stammering Be Outgrown?
- Effect of Stammering on the Mind
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- —Why some cases cannot be corrected?
- —Why you talk differently when angry?
- —Why you are sometimes free from your trouble?
- —How stammering interferes with normal expression?
- —How stammering causes nervousness?
- —How stammering affects the mind?
- —How stammering affects the health?
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The Devil's Pool

By GREYE LA SPINA

A thrilling novel of an evil pool in an abandoned quarry—an eery werewolf story

1. "I'd willingly sell my soul to the Devil. . . ."

"THERE ain't going to be no weddin'," said the taxi-driver, his thick brows scowling upon Mason Hardy.

"No wedding? You're crazy," said the prospective best man, and laughed easily.

"Yeah?"

"Mr. Baker would have gotten word to me, if that were the case," Hardy asserted, his keen eyes upon the driver's dour, melancholy visage.

"Yeah?"

Hardy lost patience. "Listen, my good fellow! If you've anything to impart, be kind enough to get it over without delay. The wedding is set for two o'clock today and it's now noon."

The taxi-driver drooped heavily in his seat. "Mister, kin there be a weddin' without a bride?" he asked. This was indeed a pointed query.

"A wedding without a bride?" echoed the other, puzzled.

"Says you."

"What on earth do you mean?" Hardy snapped.

"I mean that Miss Selene Arkwright left town about six weeks ago."

"The hell she did!"

"Hell's got more to do with it than you might think, mister. If you ain't heard from Mr. Baker fer the last coupla months you've got a nice earful comin' to you. Me . . . I lost my little kid Jacky the same way," said the taxi-driver's harsh voice, and was suddenly tremulous and tender.

Mason Hardy stripped off his rucksack and tossed it into the cab. He mounted the front seat with the driver.

"Step on it," he ordered briskly. "And give me a line on things as we go along."

"My kid was only five years old," began the driver brokenly, slipping the clutch into gear, "an' he was playin' around with a bunch of other kids on the edge of Baumann's woods one afternoon about a month ago, an' the other kids said later that a tall, thin, ugly-lookin' man came out of the woods and promised any of them a bag of candy if they'd go along with him. An' my kid was so little . . . he went."

"Well?" prompted Hardy impatiently, yet with an undertone of sympathy.

"He ain't never come back, mister. The chief of police sent out a coupla men, and we hunted and hunted, but all we found was little Jacky's cap lyin' at the foot of a tree near the old quarry. The chief questioned Lem Schwartz . . . we was sure he was the man the kids was tellin' about . . . but Lem said the kid must've fell into the pool and got drownded."

"Sorry, old chap. But what has this to do with Miss Arkwright?"

"Well, mister, perhaps she fell into the pool, an' maybe it put a spell or somethin' on her, so she can't leave Baumann's any more."

Had it not been for the man's loss of his little boy, Hardy would have given

"He hitched into full moonlight for another look at what he felt he simply could not have seen."

way to derisive laughter, but the taxi man's face, distorted with grief, restrained him from giving voice to his amusement at the absurd theory.

"We'll have to look into this," he said sympathetically. "What do you figure is wrong with the pool?"

"That's queer, too, mister," said the taxi-driver. "Old Eli's granddaughter had a bad fall about a year ago an' ain't been able to walk sence. Old Eli sets store by that little gal, the way I did by my Jacky. Folks say he bust out cryin' one day down at the post-office an' said he'd willin'ly sell his soul to the devil if he could only give his little Janie the things she wanted. An' they do say it weren't long after that they was a bossy hired man out on Eli's place, an' if Lem Schwartz ain't close to bein' a devil I miss my say-so." He concluded with a grunt of disgust.

"Interesting," commented young Hardy, "but hardly conclusive."

"That ain't all," continued the driver, punctuating his remarks with nervous movements of his foot on the accelerator that sent the taxi forward in spasmodic jerks. "There ain't been no heavy rains about these parts for mor'n a year, *an' yet* that hole in the quarry is all filled up . . . with water, I suppose, even if none of us that's seen it likes the queer looks of it. Acts as if it was alive," muttered the taxi man half under his breath.

"Probably a spring?" offered the young-er man.

"Spring nothin'," snorted the driver with the utmost contempt for such an easy solution of his puzzle. "That quarry pool

wasn't there the day before Lem Schwartz was first seen on old Eli's farm, and the day after *he* was there, the *pool* was there." His tone said plainly: Now, don't think you can get around *that*.

HARDY thought it best not to dispute the miraculous appearance of the pool that had synchronized with the coming of the devilish Lem. He remained silent until the cab drew up before an unpretentious bungalow prettily set in an attractively landscaped plot.

"Here y'are, mister. An' if there's a weddin', I'll drive you free of charge," scoffed the driver, accepting his fare and tip with a brief nod of thanks. "No weddin' without a bride, an' you'll find Miss Arkwright can't get away from that pool," he prophesied in a low, fierce voice. "It ain't got no bottom, that pool . . . we dragged it . . . an' I believe it goes straight down to hell. An' if it does, I'm the man that'll be sendin' that devil at Baumann's back to where he belongs, one of these here days."

He threw in his clutch, stepped on the gas, and his cab departed rattling down the village street.

Hardy looked after the cab with puzzled face. When he turned to walk up the gravelled path to the bungalow, he was disturbed to see his old college friend dashing out of the front door and down to meet him. In that hasty oncoming he read something of ill omen.

"Mason! You didn't get my letters?" cried out the bridegroom in a kind of wild abandon to the nervous excitement all too clearly pervading him.

"I didn't stop home at all, old man," deprecated Mason. He did not elucidate, thinking it unnecessary. Earl Baker knew that he spent weeks at a time hiking in out-of-the-way places for antiques, rarely getting in touch with home or office during his absences.

"I am almost out of my head, Mason," groaned Earl Baker, seizing his friend's arm with frenzied grasp. "Come into the house. I've so much to tell you, and I don't know where to begin," he choked.

Hardy slung his knapsack over one shoulder and hurriedly went up the path. He was shocked and perturbed at the evidences of nervous strain shown by his ordinarily poised friend. Apparently there had been fragments of truth in the taxi man's strange innuendoes.

Once inside the house, he flung the knapsack to one side and pushed his friend down into a big chair, seating himself opposite.

"Control yourself, Earl," he commanded sharply. "Why, man, your nerves must be in ruinous shape, for you to let yourself go the way you're doing."

Earl Baker jerked out a short, wretched sound that may have been meant for derisive laughter, but that fell harsh and jangling upon the ear.

"Do you think it's so easy for a man to lose his bride without her offering the slightest reason for jilting him?"

"Selene has jilted you?" cried Hardy incredulously.

"Well, it amounts to that," almost moaned the deserted bridegroom.

"For the love of heaven, get this story out of your system, Earl," exploded Mason Hardy. "The taxi-driver nearly drove me frantic with wild yarns about devilish hired men and mysterious pools and a drowned child and Selene's disappearance. Pull yourself together, man, and tell me what it's all about. Do you get married today, or don't you?"

"I don't," admitted Earl wretchedly. "A couple of months ago Selene went down to Eli Baumann's farm to teach Janie kindergarten work, and after she'd made two or three visits there, she just didn't come back."

"Just stayed on? You mean, she re-

fused to come back here? That she isn't being detained forcibly?"

"That's what I mean."

"It's incredible, old man. Selene loved you. She—she couldn't just stay away like that without a good reason."

"There is a reason, but she won't tell me what it is. So I asked Father Paul to see her."

"Father Paul is still here, is he? Good old man. . . . When did he see her?"

"He went this morning. I'm expecting him back any minute."

Hardy drew the curtain aside and stared down the street against the light of the blazing afternoon sun. As yet there was no sign of the plump gray horse that took Father Paul about the country on parochial visits. He shook his head and let the curtain drop into place. Earl sighed heavily, lips quivering. Mason's alert blue eyes slipped past that thin, ascetic face, for he disliked to confront the trouble he read only too easily upon it.

"You don't suppose the mysterious attraction on the Baumann farm has gotten its clutches into Father Paul, do you?"

Earl shook his head decidedly. "Oh, no," he asseverated.

"But if it got hold of Selene, why not Father Paul?" argued Mason, not illogically.

Earl pushed back his untouched lunch. "I believe he knows too much for them, Mason. They're afraid of him."

"They?" queried the other significantly.

"They . . . or it. I really don't think I quite know what I do mean, old man. This business about Selene has just broken me up. Everything was fine until she went down there at old Eli's request, to give Janie kindergarten instruction. From then on, it's been . . . well, inferno," he ended, bitter sharpness pointing his words. "Hark! I thought I heard hoofs."

Mason lifted the curtain again. "He's coming. Sorry, old chap, but he's alone."

2. "The dead man on his feet, staring. . . ."

"GOD!" ejaculated Earl Baker, clasping and unclasping his nervous hands and throwing an impassioned look upward. "For nearly two months she's been down on that impoverished farm, telling me to keep away from her and forget her. Why?"

"It's a darn queer situation, Earl, I must admit. Hello, Father Paul," and Mason turned to greet the newcomer, who had let himself into the house with the freedom of a welcome intimate.

The priest was short, sturdily built, slightly florid. From his round, wide face beamed small but pleasant blue eyes of the understanding kind that can twinkle impartially upon saint or sinner. He stamped in heavily, pulled out a chair and sank into it, puffing.

"This July heat is phenomenal," he gasped, as soon as he could catch his breath sufficiently to speak. "Pour me a glass of water, my boy. I'm that perishing with thirst I can hardly think."

Earl Baker, pouring the requested water, spoke with downcast eyes as if he feared to meet the other's gaze.

"Selene——?"

Over the priest's round face a troubled expression deepened.

"Is she . . . well?"

"Not exactly well . . . but neither is she ill," appended Father Paul cryptically.

Earl's finely ascetic face darkened. He struck the table with his clenched fist, a blow that set the dishes a-dance.

"I can't stand this sort of thing much longer," he said in a soft, restrained voice, addressing himself to no one in particular. "It is incomprehensible. She loved me

and promised to marry me. Yet she goes down and stays there without a word of explanation and only tells me coldly to forget her."

The kindly blue eyes of Father Paul narrowed with thought. "If she bids you forget her, my son, she must have sufficient reason, for she was a good girl."

"Why do you put it in the past tense?" Earl snapped. "I ask you, why should my betrothed leave her work, and the man whom she had promised to marry, and settle down to spend her life among complete strangers on a wretched backwoods farm where there is quite nothing to offer attraction to a young and beautiful girl? It's inexplicable, I tell you, by any process of logical reasoning."

"Perhaps it might help matters to look at the situation from some other than a logical standpoint," suggested Father Paul gently. "You know that my opinion is——"

"I can not give credence to wild superstitions," exclaimed Earl impatiently. "What can a drowned child have to do with my Selene?"

Father Paul sighed heavily. "It might have much to do with her, but I pray God it has not . . . yet."

Earl stared at him a moment, then uttered a wretched laugh. With ironical intonation he said to Mason: "Father Paul believes that some ancient evil entity has been drawn into manifestation on old Eli's farm, and that my future wife has somehow been snared in his net. The bare idea of Selene's being involved in anything that isn't splendid and fine is an insult!" cried the lover angrily.

Mason Hardy held up one hand to quiet his disturbed friend.

"Well, Earl, it's possible even if not probable. Aren't you always saying that there are spiritual laws available for those human beings who come into knowledge of them, to make life easier, richer? Why couldn't an undesirable individual get hold of the workings of those same laws, applying them for purely selfish ends?"

"Absurd. Old Eli is the most harmless of antiquated farmers, wrapped up in his orphaned granddaughter Janie, who's a cripple. Besides those two, there's only their hired man."

"Lem Schwartz is about the most evil individual I've encountered in all my years of ministration," interrupted the priest, his wide face paling as he looked from one man to the other. "He's so evil that I felt the disturbing spirit of him in his very atmosphere. He's tall, and gaunt, and of saturnine aspect. There's something so repellent about him that I fail to find words for adequate explanation," mused Father Paul. "That man is . . . I dislike to say it . . . thoroughly bad. I'm convinced of it. I don't know how I can be so positive, but I am."

"What influence could that country boor have upon a girl like Selene?"

Father Paul disregarded the younger man's contemptuous query, and went on thinking aloud. "From the way old Eli acted this morning, I rather think he'd be glad to get out of whatever mischief he's managed to get into. I don't understand yet just what it is, for while he is terrified by Lem Schwartz, he is also resentful and bitter against him. It's an odd situation."

"Is it possible that Selene's feelings have been acted upon by Janie's pathetic condition?" inquired Mason thoughtfully.

"For me," pronounced Father Paul with decision, "Janie is the key to the whole situation."

"Janie!" almost snorted Earl Baker, with an exasperated look at the old priest, who bore his scrutiny with tranquil poise.

"What could that fourteen-year-old girl have to do with the situation, Fa-

ther?" inquired Mason. He was frankly curious.

"Well, my son, it is difficult to put my feelings into words. Janie isn't stupid, but she isn't very . . . what I'd call bright. She has moments of peculiar insight that are positively uncanny, and then again she is just a very childish, ingenuous little girl. Her grandfather is whole-heartedly devoted to her. Yes, I feel assured that in Janie we shall find the key to the situation."

Earl Baker crumpled the tablecloth under one hand that kept opening and shutting nervously upon it. "All this is unbearable. We keep talking, talking, speculating, speculating. . . . And Selene stays in that miserable place, held by some mysterious attraction which has allured her to the extent of making her withdraw her promise of marriage."

FATHER PAUL, again disregarding the young man's outburst, commented irrelevantly, brow furrowed: "Eli has another guest, by the way; a young Jewish fellow, named Harry Epstein. He was around town during the week of the county fair. Drove a little canvas-topped Ford truck with an old piano on it and sang popular songs to his own accompaniment. Sold sheet music."

"Do you mean to tell me that that fellow's being held there, too?" asked Earl, his ascetic face all at once drawn into a sneer. "This is too much!" He groaned and dropped his distorted face into his twitching hands.

"Epstein warned me off," said Father Paul, a reminiscent smile drawing wrinkles into the corners of his kindly blue eyes. "Said he hoped to leave there, bringing Miss Arkwright, in the course of a couple of months. And old Eli, at whom he kept looking strangely as he said it, gave a terrible moaning cry and rushed off to hide himself somewhere."

"I can't get my soul quieted!" cried the tortured lover wildly. "They won't let me go onto the Baumann place now, Mason."

"Listen, old man. What's to prevent my scouting about a bit and trying to find out what this mess is, anyway?" offered Hardy, his keen blue eyes alight with eager speculation. "Bet you I can bring Selene away!" He looked across the table and up at the mantelpiece, where stood a large photograph in solitary importance, the portrait of a grave-faced, beautiful girl. "Where did that Schwartz fellow hail from, Father Paul?"

"Nobody seems to know. He appeared one day on the Baumann place, shortly after old Eli had been heard to make a statement about selling his soul to the devil for Janie's sake. The fellow has as evil a face as I have ever seen," and the good man crossed himself rapidly at the memory of it.

"What do you think of my chances of getting in and finding out how matters stand?"

"You may get in there and you may be able to get a line on what the whole thing means, unless you are drawn into it yourself."

"And suppose I am?" contemptuously. "Why can not I get word then to you people, so that you'll be able to come down to the rescue?"

"That might help us greatly, my son."

"Strange that Selene won't tell me what it's all about," complained the deserted bridegroom. "If you can do what you say, Mason, I shall never be able to repay you." His eyes were eloquent.

Hardy laughed.

"It's the peace of my soul, too. I shall never be able to go on with my 'Y' work here, if Evil is to be allowed to triumph

over Good, as it seems so far to have done," finished Earl despondently.

"How big is that Schwartz fellow? Bigger than I?" asked Mason of the priest, squaring his broad tweed-clad shoulders with the shyly conscious air of a man who does not have to be told that he is in the pink of condition.

"You won't have to fight him the way you're thinking," retorted the priest. "At least, I don't think so. But you'll have to make up your mind not to be afraid of anything that might happen. The fact that a thing *does* happen, Mr. Hardy, brings it within the jurisdiction of the laws of natural phenomena."

Mason caught a certain significance of tone and said, with a flash of keen blue eyes: "I don't think I'm afraid of anything . . . regular."

"It's not the regular thing that makes the blood run chill, my son," replied the priest. "It's the irregularity of a thing that sometimes makes it seem terrible. The dead man lying at rest in his coffin isn't terrifying. It's the dead man on his feet, staring at you through the half-light of a dim room that makes your hair stand on end."

"There won't be any dead men walking on the Baumann farm," the younger man asserted skeptically. "So I shall have nothing to fear."

"There is the Destruction Which Walketh at noonday," suggested the priest softly.

Mason met the old eyes squarely. "As long as it is noonday, I can see It and keep out of Its way. And as the full moon is due in two days, even the nights will be bright for a while yet." He laughed again, his easy, confident laugh.

"The light of the full moon does not bring security, my son. It has its own peculiar perils," murmured Father Paul, oddly.

"All this mysterious chatter gets us nowhere," snapped Earl Baker, his nerves obviously at the breaking-point.

"Buck up, Earl. I'll go there tomorrow morning. And I'm a go-getter, you know. We'll have your sweetheart back, or know the reason why."

"Knowing the reason why might not be a consolation, my son," murmured an ironical voice, as Father Paul tugged down the vest that immediately wrinkled back on his plump body.

"I've an idea, Mason," offered Earl Baker, eagerly. "Suppose you go down and can't get word to us if you're detained? Why not pretend you're a violinist on vacation?"

"Can't play a note, old man," scoffed Mason. "And why?"

"That means nothing in this case. I'll give you my violin. They'll surely ask you to play. Then if they do, and won't let you come back, pretend to be temperamental and tell them you've got my violin by mistake, and have them take it back for exchange."

"Sorry, but I don't see——"

"Can't you give me a chance? If that violin is sent back here, instead of your coming yourself, we'll understand that you're being detained."

"I get you. In the nature of an SOS ?"

"Exactly."

"Not so bad, Earl," commended Hardy.

Father Paul turned, where he stood in the doorway on his way out.

"Your friend is loaning you his violin, Mr. Hardy. I'm going to give you something, too. Something that ought to be useful, and you can have it for your own all your life." His voice was dark with import. "Don't forget that Evil can not utterly triumph as long as there is the slightest desire or effort to hold on to Good."

His heavy tread went down the hallway like the portentous footfall of Fate.

3. "For God's sake, get away from here while you can!"

His hiking knapsack strapped on his back, and Earl's violin-case in his hand, Mason got through the boundary fence that separated the Baumann farm from the state highway, disregarding the many large warnings against trespass that were nailed every few yards. Mason did not wish to let his presence be known until late afternoon, for when the shadows lengthened a lost hiker might be expected to ask some direction to town, or even a night's shelter. Moreover, he was in hopes that Selene Arkwright might, by some happy chance, stroll in the woods, in which case he could have a few words with her alone.

His wrist-watch said it was a little after one o'clock. He had plenty of time to follow up trails in the Baumann woods, and with this in mind, and a keen gratefulness for the thick shade of the sheltering trees (the July sun was unbearably hot), he took a slightly worn path that he figured would lead him into the center of the woods. By half-past two he had succumbed to the stifling humidity of the super-heated air and was looking about for a favorable spot under a tree, where he could safely take a siesta.

From time to time the pathway led past great granite ledges, and all at once an agreeable sight met the wayfarer's eyes. One of these ledges had been quarried out deeply; almost the entire center had been cut away, leaving a deep hollow some twenty feet across. In this great artificial bath of granite sparkled, as if with some innate life of its own, such clear and glittering water as Hardy had rarely seen. Usually forest pools are dank, stagnant, full of decaying unpleasantnesses. But this water attracted by its appearance of inviting coolness; the sparkling ripples almost called their message of refreshment. What Hardy did not notice was that there was not a breath of a breeze to stir the surface of that ever-in-motion pool. . . .

To a man melting in July heat, the temptation was insuperable. Hardy made a quick survey of the near-by woods, finding no opening in the infrequently used trail that might point out a possibility of embarrassing interruption. Promptly the knapsack tumbled at the foot of a tree, and near it the violin-case was laid. The khaki outing shirt flew over Mason's head and he sat down on the mossy ground to remove his shoes. Busied with the laces, he did not notice the approach of a man who stopped directly in front of him, until the newcomer spoke in a sharply incisive tone, with significant tenseness.

"Stop!" said this man, and with one foot pushed away Mason's busy fingers that were engaged in untying shoe-laces.

Young Hardy jerked his head upward with a startled exclamation, then got quickly to his feet, eyeing the newcomer curiously.

"You're trespassing. Didn't you see the signs?" asked the man, with a gesture toward the very tree under which Mason had laid the violin and knapsack. As he spoke, his eyes shot agitated glances over his shoulder, in what Mason surmised might be the direction of the Baumann farmhouse.

"What's your trouble?" countered Mason lightly. "This place yours?"

The other man jerked an impatient head. "Never mind whose place it is. What I'm telling you is to get off it as quickly as you can make it, if you value your life and your sanity!"

"I think you must be Harry Epstein," observed Mason acutely.

The dark, Hebraic face scowled. "How did you know?"

"Father Paul."

"Hmm. Well, I'm Epstein. What of it? Listen, whoever you may be. Get away from here while the going's good. Understand? And thank your God——"

He broke off abruptly, as a sharp whistle cut the air imperatively. Then he added hastily, in a half-whisper: "I mustn't be seen talking to you. But for God's sake, get away from here while you can."

With that he sped up the forest trail and disappeared.

MASON HARDY deliberated for a moment. He looked at his outing shirt and one shoe lying on the moss. Then he laughed shortly, got off the other shoe, and in a moment had stripped and was ready for his attractive plunge into the inviting forest pool.

The quarrymen had cut the rock on that side into the semblance of a rude flight of wide high steps. He descended until only his head could have been glimpsed from the woodland trail. As he dipped one foot into the water, which was delightfully, exhilaratingly cool, his eyes fell upon his wrist-watch, which he had forgotten to remove. He sprang up the steps, leaving a damp trail on the granite under the foot that had tested the water's temperature. Suddenly he stood stock-still, fumbling at the strap of the watch.

Sitting cross-legged on the ground like some ugly Eastern god was a man who must have been extraordinarily tall when he stood upright, for there seemed to be an abnormal length of limb tucked under him. Earl Baker's violin-case lay open on his lap and he was in the act of picking at the strings with his long, wiry fingers, just as Mason came up out of the pool. The impudence of the newcomer struck Mason momentarily dumb, but in a moment he had recovered his usual poise.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing, my man? Put that violin down!" His wet foot tracking moist blots on the granite, Mason neared the man, who lifted his face sufficiently to inspect that damp trail with a kind of sneering satisfaction.

"I really don't understand why you should object to my looking at property that belongs to you," said he pointedly, leisurely closing the violin-case and putting it down with composure. "You seem to have been making use of other people's property yourself."

Mason stopped short as the speaker rose, attaining his full height, that of a man of unusually gaunt and meager proportions for what must have been six feet four inches. One look at that dark and saturnine face was sufficient to apprise the adventurer that he was encountering Lem Schwartz; for only to Lem could have belonged those piercing black eyes that lowered evilly under bushy, overhanging eyebrows that met in a straight line over the hooked nose; only Lem could have smiled with such a wide spread of snarling, thin lips that the impression between them of those sharp and glistening white teeth was as of a fierce and implacable wild beast, restrained momentarily, but momentarily only.

"Sorry," deprecated Mason, somewhat abashed at this inapropos meeting with Lem Schwartz, which was not at all of his planning. "But the heat was so oppressive and the pool so inviting——"

Lem Schwartz bent his terrible smile upon the granite, from which the July heat had already begun to evaporate the younger man's moist trail. He permitted a gurgling laugh to escape him, a laugh that subtly conveyed malevolence.

"Swimming in this pool is trespassing, my fine young man. You'll have to go

along with me to see what the owner thinks about it."

Taken at a disadvantage, although getting into the Baumann house on one excuse or another had been his primary intention, the trespasser did not speak for a moment, and Schwartz misunderstood his silence, for he leaned down and picked up violin-case and knapsack with a conclusive air.

"If you don't choose to dress, come along as you are," invited he with an ugly grin. "But it's just possible you may prefer to dress. There's a nice young lady up at the farmhouse."

Mason bit his lip in the difficult attempt to keep his temper. He had not planned to make his appearance under escort like a captured criminal. However, there was nothing to do but appear to fall in with the saturnine Lem's scarcely concealed commands. Mason motioned angrily for the hired man to put down the violin and knapsack. He then dressed hurriedly and presently strapped the latter article to his shoulders, and would have picked up the violin as well, but——

"I'd better take charge of this, young stranger," murmured Lem, significantly. "Too hot to chase anybody through the woods today," he grunted. "Suppose you enjoyed your stolen swim?" he inquired suddenly, and again that snarling laugh rent his thin lips across gleaming teeth horridly.

FIGURING that his intentions, if not the actual facts, had made him a trespasser, Mason shrugged his shoulders in acquiescence and followed his guide down the trail until the woods opened into fine pasture land, across from which stood a great two-family stone farmhouse. It was built of granite undoubtedly taken from the quarry that now offered such delights to a swimmer. From the chimney on one side of the house clouds of heavy smoke hung; the other half of the house had drawn shades and the chimney belched no sign of cooking preparations.

Sitting on a long, decrepit-looking bench on the rear porch was the round-shouldered form of a man who straightened his dejectedly hanging head as Lem and Mason approached. This was old Eli, Mason figured, and looked with secret interest upon that mysterious old farmer who was playing host to two such different individuals as Selene Arkwright and Harry Epstein. The old man was gray and wizened of countenance; straggling white hair hung in confusion on either side of his meek brown eyes that stared out under the shabby straw hat; his once-black trousers and vest were white at the seams and shiny green from long wear and exposure to weather.

"Brought you a fiddler this time," called Lem Schwartz loudly, as he approached. "Janie'll like that, won't she? You can't reproach me with forgetting my side of a bargain, Eli."

The old man staggered uncertainly to his feet, the meek brown eyes staring upon the youthful figure behind Lem. One hand lifted, waved them back; the other covered a trembling old mouth from which issued a pitiful, wailing cry which he seemed struggling to smother, his eyes shifting to Lem's hard face in what appeared mingled resentment and fear.

"No! No! No!" he exclaimed quaveringly. "I—I don't want any more people here. I—I haven't room for them. I—I can't afford any more."

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Baumann," Mason Hardy reassured the old man, "I have no intention of remaining. Just happened to be strolling in your woods, and took the liberty of stopping for a swim in your inviting pool, when your man——"

"Father in Heaven! The pool? You—you swam in the pool?"

Lem interrupted. "He had a nice cool swim, and I brought him here for safe-keeping until . . . day after tomorrow," he finished, in significant tone and with a sardonic grin. The old man's face went white. "Tomorrow night is the full of the moon, you know."

"Sorry I trespassed," Mason began to apologize. "If you will permit me to do so, I'll gladly pay whatever you feel I should, and then you can direct me on my way."

"No . . . you've got to stay . . . now," quavered the old man, brown eyes wide, mouth loose-lipped and trembling. "Sorry . . . but I can't let you go now . . . until . . . until——"

"Until after the full of the moon," finished Lem Schwartz, evil black eyes hard with ominous menace. "And then you may see fit to remain here, Mr. Fiddler, and play for Janie."

Lem might have received a sharp retort had not Mason's attention been diverted by the stirring of a woman's garments. At the open door appeared a girl of twenty-two or three, a girl whom he recognized from the photograph on Earl Baker's mantel, although the eyes that had been tranquil in the portrait were now wide and startled, the firm lips tremulous as if on the verge of crying out. . . . The plainly dressed, unbobbed black hair, the dark gray eyes, were those of Selene Arkwright.

As Lem spoke, she pressed both hands convulsively against her bosom. Her gray eyes turned with shrinking pain and horror upon the newcomer. When she spoke it was as if the words pressed out without her volition, from her overflowing soul.

"Oh, you poor, unhappy man! You have been in the quarry pool!"

Not seeing fit to make detailed explanations at that moment, in the presence of so many witnesses, Mason Hardy nodded.

"Harry!" called Selene, without turning.

A man appeared from the dim room behind her and stood looking over her shoulder. It was the man who had warned Mason back in the woods, and he was now looking at the newcomer with a kind of cold fury.

"Idiot!" he said accusingly. That one word, but it expressed volumes of emotion.

Lem looked from one man to the other, a sardonic smile distorting his dark visage. "You two have met before," he stated rather than asked. "Did you attempt to warn him, Mr. Epstein?" His mocking assumption of respectfulness could have deceived no one. "Rather unwise on your part, wasn't it? You should have welcomed him instead, for the larger the company grows, the more will dear Mr. Baumann feel his moral responsibility. . . ."

Old Eli, with a shrill cry of agony, pressed gnarled hands to his temples, brushing off the wide straw hat with an unheeding gesture of desperation.

"Devil! You devil!" he stammered wildly. "I won't! I won't do it! You shan't force me to do it! I'll put up a sign at the pool, to warn people——"

Lem silenced him with a wide, unpleasant smile that drew the thin lips tightly back against the pointed white teeth. He did not speak a single word, but old Eli's hands dropped to his sides, and the old man turned abruptly around, pushed precipitately past Selene Arkwright and disappeared into the house.

For a moment the hired man stood regarding the girl who clung, white-faced and trembling, to the door-frame. Then his glittering black eyes turned slowly until the whites gleamed at the corners, to rest with malicious satisfaction upon Harry Epstein's furrowed brow. Last of all, those hard orbs, shining with reptilian

coldness, shifted to Mason Hardy's wary, puzzled countenance.

"I leave our fiddling friend in your custody, Mr. Epstein, until after the full of the moon," said he, and a horrid chuckling choked him into further silent merriment.

4. *"Tonight, watch from your window. . . ."*

HARRY EPSTEIN, watching Lem's departure, lifted one clenched fist and shook it with impotent menace at the gaunt man's back, muttering something of dark malediction under his breath.

Selene touched his arm nervously. "Don't, please, Harry. Aren't things bad enough as they are, without swearing?"

The young Jew turned sullenly but with gentle deference, and went into the room, beckoning Mason to follow.

"For tonight the old man will probably give you a room this side of the house," opined Harry Epstein, as they went inside.

At these apparently innocent words, Selene gave a soft little exclamation of distress. Her eyes and the young Jew's met, held, then turned away in embarrassment, avoiding Mason's puzzled gaze. Mason made a wild guess.

"Until after the full of the moon?" he murmured, ironically, and his keen blue eyes flashed from Selene's face to Harry's, for the two had swayed together as if by common impulse and were regarding him with a kind of incredulity.

"Then you *know?*" the music-peddler accused resentfully. "You came here on purpose. I didn't have to warn you against the pool. Why did you go into it, then?" sharply.

Mason hesitated. However much he might distrust the other man, a complete stranger, yet Harry had tried to warn him against something once that afternoon, and it was evident that Selene trusted the young Jew.

"Earl sent me," said Mason, finally, to Selene.

"You came from him?" she whispered. "You dared come to this accursed place, risking so much, for Earl's sake?" Tears stood in her fine eyes, and she had to choke back the sob that rose in her throat. "I recognized you almost at once, Mason Hardy, from Earl's old class photograph."

"Say, Hardy, if you knew all about the affair, why the dickens did you make a bee-line for the pool and jump into it? Especially after I'd warned you to keep out?"

Mason laughed, his easy laugh. "You may think you told me something, but you didn't get that far. Besides, I wasn't really in the pool at all. I just stepped in and out again, when *he* appeared." He jerked his head in the direction Lem had gone, to designate the object of his remark.

Selene's gray eyes lifted. "You didn't *immerse* yourself in the pool?" she whispered, with an eagerness oddly anxious for such a simple query.

"Just tried the temperature with one foot, and then found I'd forgotten to take off my wrist-watch. So I went out, and there was that chap Lem sitting with my violin. . . . He's no regular hired man, Epstein; the language he employs——"

"Whatever he is, Mr. Violinist, he's got the drop on all of us here," jerked out Harry unwillingly. "Selene and I——" he hesitated, with a quick glance at the girl.

"Go on, Harry," she directed him. "We can not consider conventions under these conditions of stress," she explained to Mason.

"I was just going to say that Mason, here, will naturally eat with old Baumann tonight. But tomorrow night," pointedly, "he will probably be with us."

"Hmmm. After the full of the moon," commented Mason dryly, and was once again astonished at the girl's little choked outcry.

"What do you know? How much do you know? Why do you keep on repeating that?"

"My dear Selene, I don't know a thing," confessed Mason. "But all I've heard since I came here has seemed to hinge upon the full of the moon. Can you tell me why, yourself?"

Selene exhaled slowly. "I thought perhaps you knew about things here, and could help us to get away," she whispered, her eyes turned to an inner door, through which old Eli could now be seen, puttering over a cooking-stove.

"If you want to leave here," declared Mason, smiling, "say the word. It is just a matter of leaving, as I see it."

She shook her head with a hopeless air.

"Impossible. You don't understand the real situation. It's not just a matter of walking away. It's far more complicated than that. Listen, Mason. . . ." She lowered her voice to a cautious undertone. "We must remain here until we learn just what old Mr. Baumann has to do to save us from Lem's clutches. Oh, I daren't tell you more, but tonight . . . *watch from your window,*" she whispered fearfully.

"Selene!" Harry's voice was sharp. He laid one finger against his lips warningly.

"But Mason is Earl's friend," she murmured tensely. "I owe him some explanation, don't I, after he's risked coming here to help us? And perhaps, after tomorrow night," she faltered, "he'll be condemned to stay here, too."

The young Jew turned to Mason, his face strained with anxiety.

"If only you hadn't stepped into the pool!" he deprecated. "But perhaps it won't mean so much; you weren't fully immersed. I hope it'll turn out that way, because then you'll be free to go back and tell Father Paul whatever you've seen down here. He's a wise old bird. If *he* can't help us, we're sure done for," finished the music peddler in his low, guarded voice.

"But how did Selene get into the pool?" curiously inquired Mason, glancing cautiously toward the inner door.

The girl herself replied. "Janie asked me to bring her some wild columbine blossoms from the woods. Lem offered to show me where they were, and when we were on the verge of the pool, he pushed me into the water." She shuddered, her gray eyes closing for a moment as if to shut out the very memory of the scene.

"Completely immersed. Get me? Same here," Epstein said.

"But Harry jumped in to save me," Selene murmured quickly, with a grateful glance at the young Jew.

"Any decent man would have done the same. That wasn't anything, Selene."

"What Earl owes you, he can never repay," the girl replied, controlling her trembling voice with difficulty.

"Nonsense! Sh-sh-sh! Here comes Eli."

"SUPPER is ready for the violinist," said the old man from just without the door. "It's—it's getting dark," he added, in a tense tone with a shade of something fearful in his implication.

Selene sighed audibly. "Come, Harry. It's time for us to go. Don't ask questions, Mason, please." She stepped close to him and put her lips against his ear. "Don't let them know you weren't completely immersed in the pool," she breathed warningly, and left him, to follow Harry across the next room to a door that communicated with the apparently untenanted side of the house.

As she approached, this door swung open. Selene stopped short, so that Harry narrowly escaped collision with her shrinking form. Mason Hardy, straining to see beyond the two into the darkness of the room beyond, became aware of two redly glittering points that seemed to reflect the pale light of the kerosene lamp upon the kitchen supper table. Like eyes were those points; evil eyes, that gloated vindictively.

"It's getting dark," said old Eli, again. He seemed to be shrinking in abject horror from that opening door. "The sun has set. Go! Why are you standing here? Go! Go!"

His voice, his words, pushed against the reluctant two. Selene Arkwright did not hesitate then, but moved resignedly into the enveloping darkness of that other room. Behind her trod Harry Epstein. The door closed upon them. Old Eli, in a kind of relief mingled with apprehension, sprang across the room with astonishing agility for so old a man, and turned the key in the lock hastily, trying the door with care to be sure it was securely fastened. Then he turned to his sole remaining guest.

"Vegetable soup," he offered prosaically. "Hope you like it. . . . Janie!" His voice raised slightly as he went to the foot of the staircase. "Is the soup all right?"

From the upper floor a girlish voice floated down gayly.

"Awful good, gramper. Got some more crackers for Janie, gramper?"

"Find a seat, mister, and help yourself. . . . Gramper's coming, Janie."

Two places had been set at the supper table. There was some kind of dark-colored jam, a hunk of cheese, a pot of passable tea, as Mason discovered, pouring himself a steaming cupful; plenty of rye bread, and the vegetable soup as a main dish. The soup was good, as Janie had said. Mason made a fairly good meal, in silence.

Old Eli ate little except his plateful of soup. His conversation (if it could be called such) was monosyllabic, elicited by questions directed at him in such a way that he could hardly have avoided a reply without discourtesy.

That the child upstairs was listening eagerly to every word became apparent when she occasionally called down to the men, and finally asked Mason if he wouldn't play for her. Supper being over and nothing ahead for the evening but bed, he could hardly refuse; so he opened the violin-case and took out the instrument with awkward and amateurish care, old Eli watching in uninterested dejection.

"This isn't my violin!" exclaimed Hardy, with as much excitement as he could manage to muster. "I've left my Strad at my friend's house and taken his violin by mistake!"

"That shouldn't keep you from playing," said old Eli, with a suspicious look from under his meek brows.

Mason shrugged his shoulders in as nearly a temperamental manner as he could achieve. "What? Use a common violin? *Never!*" cried he tragically, choking back his impulse to laughter.

Old Eli narrowly watched the restoration of the violin to its case. "I'll have Lem take it back tomorrow and get yours," he offered slowly.

"Oh, please do, gramper! Mr. Fiddler, I want *so* to hear you play!"

All at once Mason straightened up from the violin-case and stood in a listening attitude. "What's that?" he asked bruskly.

"The—the dogs," replied old Eli, in patent uneasiness. "Time you went to your room, mister. That way," and he in-

dicated the stairs leading to the upper floor.

"Dogs?" echoed Mason, brow furrowed. "I haven't seen any on the place, so far."

Old Eli avoided the keen blue orbs of the younger man, as if he feared lest some secret be surprized in his own brown eyes that now sought the floor. The noises in the next house increased, so that they could be heard plainly: snarling, growls, snapping of teeth.

"Some dogs!" commented Hardy, as he turned reluctantly to go upstairs.

5. *"Little piles of gnawed white bones. . . ."*

THE room to which Mason had been assigned was separated only by a thin painted-board partition from the hall and the next room, which was Janie's. Mason could hear every word of the old man and the child, as Eli gathered up Janie's tray. Also, in spite of the fact that the wall between this little whitewashed room and the next house was of heavy granite, the young man continued to hear that heavy scratching, whining, snarling. Dogs? So old Eli had said.

He unpacked his knapsack, stopping occasionally to listen to that scratching and clicking as of heavily nailed beasts scampering about. The snarling, and then a pitiful whining, began to set his nerves on edge. If Eli kept dogs, he evidently kept them loose in the house next door, the house into which an hour past Mason had seen Selene and Harry disappearing. He wondered how the girl could sleep through those noises, and no longer wondered at her sleep-heavy eyes.

He exchanged his hiking-shoes for rubber-soled sneakers and laid out his automatic pistol and an electric flashlight. Then he drew a chair to the window and settled down listening, occasionally leaning out over the unscreened sill to gaze upon the moonlight-flooded beauty of the night.

The murmuring of voices from Janie's room had ceased. Silence reigned oppressively. Once he thought he heard the tiptoeing of some one across the hall to his door. He would have spoken, but flashing intuition bade him remain silent. Let old Eli think him asleep.

The combined heat, and an overpowering drowsiness that made him speculate sleepily if anything could have been put into his food, had about put him off guard, when the creaking of rusty hinges came faintly to him from below. He was wide awake in an instant, and bolt upright, listening intently. Then he leaned recklessly over the sill, and found he could see a door on the other side of the house, a door opening into the back yard from which one could step in a few paces directly into the woods. The door was opening slowly upon the yawning darkness of the other house's interior.

From that opening a long, gaunt gray beast slunk, keeping in the shadow of the house as if to escape observation. As it went, belly to the grass, stretching itself across the green in long strides, its head turned upward toward the watcher's window. A double row of terrible teeth flashed as it emerged from the shadow, and two fiery eyes glinted redly in the moonlight as if they reflected a fire.

"Dog?" the young man asked himself in astonishment. "Never! That is a huge wolf!"

His head whirled with impossible surmises. He sat back out of the moonlight's spreading radiance and thought hard and fast. He had seen a girl and a man going into that other house, and he inferred that the saturnine hired man also slept on that side of the building. Now he had watched a great gray wolf creep stealthily out, to

disappear into the near-by woods. A low whine from without. . . . He peered cautiously across the sill. Two other beasts sprang, bounding over the patch of grass, and streaked into the woods.

Mason picked up his automatic and tucked it into a hip pocket. He took up the electric torch, unbolted his door and tried it. To his relief it opened quietly. He closed it cautiously and tiptoed to a door at the head of the stairs, which he had noticed when he had come up to bed. It led to the adjoining house. It was provided with a huge bolt in addition to the key that stood in its lock. Although the possibilities in what he might be walking into made the hair prickle on his scalp, he unfastened that door and went into the darkness, drawing it closed behind him.

For a moment he stood motionless, listening, hardly daring to draw a full breath. In the gloom and strange chill of that other house reigned a stillness oppressive, ominous. He drew out the automatic and from his left hand the space about him flooded with light.

He stood in an upper hallway similar to old Eli's half of the house. Giving upon it were three wide-open doors. Hesitating at his presumption (for he had every logical reason to believe that Selene and Harry were occupying two of these rooms and Lem the third), he stepped to the open doorway of one room after another, cautiously illuminating each as he did so. Astonishing . . . chilling . . . emptiness alone met his gaze.

At the threshold of the last room he paused, his straight nose wrinkling distastefully. The odor that came from it was fetid, as if some forest creature had been denning there for weeks with windows never opened to air it. This room had no dresser, no chairs; nothing but a ragged mattress on the floor, upon which was heaped a tumbled mass of soiled—unspeakably soiled—blankets and bedding, at sight of which Hardy turned away feeling sickish, so disgusting was the incredible mess.

As he started down the stairs, a long-drawn-out ululation struck his eardrums with the hammering pulsation of something more than sound; carrying, as it were, a psychic message of terrible import. A duet of answering howls followed. Cold shivers raced up and down the young man's spinal column, although he realized fully that the sounds came from the distant woods. It was the full cry of a wolf-pack in sight of its prey! And the rooms that should have been occupied by Selene, and Harry, and that mysterious and terrible being known as Lem Schwartz, were . . . empty. . . .

As MASON, shuddering at his own imaginings, moved down the stairs toward what should be the kitchen of the house, he sensed the odor of decomposing animal matter. The stench of wild beasts' bodies in a closed, unaired place grew overpowering, sickening. It was even worse than Lem's room upstairs, and at thought of that Mason felt his stomach heave with ghastly threats of nausea. Step by step, he moved down the staircase, the torch turned off so as not to apprise any one below, if indeed anybody waited in ambush there, of his coming. But upon reaching the lower step, he flashed the light quickly about.

The kitchen was empty, but the door from it into the back room was open, and Egyptian darkness gloomed ahead. He sprang across the kitchen, automatic in readiness, and illuminated the parlor. It, also, was empty. Empty? . . . As he looked about, his nostrils contracted disgustedly against the fetid smell of decay, and his eyes went roving in search of the cause.

The floor was of bare boards; there were no chairs or other furniture in either of the two rooms. But here and there on the bare boards were—things—that Mason turned the light on, shuddering as he looked. There were black stains here and there . . . There were bits of decaying furry skin. . . . And there were little piles of gnawed white bones. . . . And almost at his feet as he stood lay a crumpled bit of material . . . He leaned down and turned it over. Good God! There had been the taxi-driver's missing child . . . and that material was . . . a child's stained, torn little rompers. . . .

Mason groaned aloud involuntarily. Then he became keenly aware of what the pervading odor conveyed. It was the unforgettable stench of wild beast kennels in the public zoos. It was unbearable, sickening, disgusting. Nausea got the better of him. He went back through the kitchen, avoiding with inward shrinking those dark stains on the wide boards, and leaped up the staircase with the disagreeable feeling that some one behind him would presently lay a chilling hand on his shoulder, or pull at his ankles. Just as he opened the communicating door, he caught the sound of padding feet and clicking nails upon the flagstone terrace outside the back of the house.

Hastily he locked and bolted the door and then fastened himself into his own room. He sprang across it to the window. Yes, the wolf-pack was returning from the chase with its quarry. A huge groundhog hung limply from the extended drooling jaws of a gaunt gray wolf, and the brown beast had a small rabbit between its glistening white teeth. Behind those two shrank a glossy little black wolf, which all at once stood still, and lifted its head toward Mason's window.

The young man's gaze met those lambent eyes, a curious stirring of surging pity in his heart. The black wolf stood for a moment only; then it slunk into the other house, tail dragging as if in shame. Mason received a distinct impression of the animal's humiliation.

The door of the other house was still open. Drifting up to his window came sounds of snarling, tearing, crunching, whining. He listened, nervous chills sending their shuddering impulses through him. The three wolves were devouring their prey. But where, then, were Selene, Harry and the mysterious, saturnine Lem . . . while those three wolves held high carnival over their prey?

Not until dawn had touched the tree tops with pale, prophetic fingers, did Mason Hardy sink back onto his bed into troubled sleep, and throughout the dreams that haunted him there stood always three empty rooms that should have been humanly tenanted.

6. *"That fast retreating form owned no following shadow. . . ."*

FROM his uneasy slumbers Mason was awakened by scratching and thumping at his door-panels. For a moment he stood half dazed, where he had sprung from bed still haunted by the nightmares of the preceding night. His impression was that some savage beast had leaped against his door from without.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply, his nerves on edge.

"Schwartz," replied a harsh voice.

"What d'you want?"

"Your friend Baker says he'll bring your own violin tomorrow. He wanted to come today, but I put him off. Tonight's the full of the moon, fiddler." A snarling laugh, and Lem's retreating footsteps, as light as if he walked upon padded paws. . . .

Through the partition Janie's voice: "Please, Mr. Fiddler, come in before you

go downstairs. I've never seen a truly violin-player. Gramper says you must play in regular concerts. I'm just crazy to hear you, Mr. Fiddler."

Mason's curiosity to see this strange child who Father Paul had believed held the key to the mystery at the Baumann place urged him to dress hastily. He donned a light outing shirt and a tweed jacket that covered the bulge on his hip occasioned by the automatic, which he decided he would not leave in the room to be appropriated either by old Eli or the saturnine Lem.

As he opened his door, old Baumann was coming up with a tray. At sight of Mason, the ancient drew back with a curious intaking of breath and an avoidance of the younger man's gaze.

"This is Janie's breakfast," he said hastily.

Mason laughed. "I had no idea you would bring my breakfast to me," he said shortly. "I can go down for it myself, and I'm hungry, I can tell you. Your vegetable soup was good, but it doesn't seem to stick to a fellow's ribs very much, Mr. Baumann."

"You'll have to see Lem about your breakfast," hastily said old Eli, still avoiding his guest's eyes.

"See Lem? What for?"

"You're not supposed to eat today," stated the old farmer briefly and strangely, after a long pause.

"I presume for the usual reason," was Mason's sarcastic observation. "The full of the moon tonight?"

Eli Baumann involuntarily went backward down two steps and leaned against the wall, staring. The tray shook in his trembling old hands.

"Who and what are you?" he whispered, meek brown eyes wide with awful apprehension.

"Is that anything to you?" asked the young man coolly, following up his seeming advantage.

"Why did you come here? Oh, God of Heaven, what have I done? What will become of my little Janie?"

The tray would have gone crashing down the stairs had not Mason sprung forward to save it. Old Eli pushed him off with frantic hands, gnarled by toil, and curled now into the semblance of claws. Mason looked speculatively at him for a long moment, then turned and carried the tray to Janie's door. At his tap she called for him to enter.

"What's the matter with gramper?" was the first thing the little girl asked, as Mason set the tray on a small table beside the bed, and bent his keen blue eyes upon the child sitting there against plumped-up pillows.

"Nothing, Janie. He's just nervous," shrugged Hardy, surveying with appreciation the pretty picture the child made.

Light brown curls hung over her shoulders, lying on the gay patchwork quilt like some French doll's marvellous locks. Her brown eyes, green-glinted, appraised the visitor, canny to a degree that Mason had not expected from Father Paul's hesitating, half-derogatory description. This child was no dolt; shy or reserved she might be, but not stupid.

Warm color flowed over Janie's pale cheeks at the admiration that her visitor permitted to appear on his face, in his pleasure at the little girl's fragile beauty. She blossomed under it like a sun-kissed rosebud.

"I like you, Mr. Fiddler," she said with naïve frankness. "You have kind eyes," she finished, contemplatively.

"Now, I call that nice of you," smiled Mason, and gave his easy laugh.

Janie dimpled. "I wish I could walk around the way everybody else does," she said all at once, tearing into little bits a

piece of toast and pushing the scraps about her plate with one finger.

"Can't you walk, Janie?" Mason asked pityingly.

She shook her head. "I fell on the rocks out in the woods a year ago. I was running after a rabbit that had gotten out of its hutch. But gramper thinks maybe some day I can walk again. He rubs my feet and legs every morning and every night, so they won't wither up. The doctor told him to."

She lifted a scrap of toast, pushed it between even little teeth, and munched slowly. "I'd love to give you some of my breakfast, but if he found it out, Lem would be furious, and he *does* make such scenes. Miss Selene and Mr. Harry don't eat with us any more; they eat with Lem, on the other side of the house. I suppose you will, too. Lem says it won't cost gramper a cent to feed anybody who stays here to teach me things."

Cold shivers were running up and down Mason's backbone.

"Gramper was worried at first. He kept telling Lem he couldn't afford a lot of people here, eating and eating. Our farm isn't so very big, and gramper is old and can't do much with it. Lem said gramper was just to leave it to him. Lem's awful smart, but I just don't like him, myself."

Janie paused, then added in a lower tone: "Sometimes I wish gramper'd send him away, only gramper says he can't afford to," and she sighed. "He says if he sent Lem away, I couldn't have Miss Selene to show me how to weave paper mats, nor Mr. Harry to play his piano and sing his funny songs to me."

MASON was listening with more than ordinary interest to the little girl's outspoken thoughts. Somewhere here he hoped to find a clue to the mystery that clung thickly about everything on the Baumann farm. Apart from that mystery, Janie was refreshingly naïve, and perhaps the most untouched and natural human being in that house of weird happenings.

"Mr. Harry is funny, isn't he? But he's very nice to me. Sometimes he pats my head as if I were a ve-e-ry little girl," she smiled mischievously, "and pulls one of my curls. Mr. Fiddler!" She leaned toward him and whispered: "It's a secret, mind, but when I grow up, I'm going to marry him. He doesn't know yet," she dimpled, an impish look flashing across her face. "Gramper says Mr. Harry is a natural-born farmer. Gramper thinks Mr. Harry ought to buy a farm instead of going around singing his funny songs. Hark! What's that?"

The agitated steps of a man who tramps carelessly because he is not thinking how or where he treads. . . . The loud voice of a man who has gotten past caring whether or not his words are diplomatic or his intonation ingratiating. . . .

"Baumann! Where are you? Oh, skulking behind the curtain! Just what might be expected of the dirty old sneak you are! Come out! Come out, I tell you!"

A squeak, as of a cornered rat. Scuffling of feet. Sharp sound of a chair striking the board floor as it is overturned. Dull thud of some heavy body pushed hard against the partition, and then Harry Epstein's voice, loud and furious.

"You let that poor girl come under Lem's curse, and never lifted a finger, when you could have taken it off in a moment, you dirty Dutch dog! Yes, Lem told me. . . . I don't care about myself, but you're going right now to the quarry pool, and I'm going with you to see that you go in, by the eternal God!"

The low, penetrating whine of old

Eli. . . . "Let me go! I tell you, it won't do you any good to drag me down there. It wouldn't be of my own free will. It has to be my own free will. . . . Stop—stop—you're—choking—me."

Janie, the faint color gone from her cheeks, stiffened and made a convulsive movement as if she would have tried to get to the floor and onto her feet. She fell back and began to sob softly.

"I can't! Oh, I can't! Mr. Fiddler, please help gramper! Mr. Harry mustn't talk that way to poor gramper!"

Hardy went down the stairs two steps at a time, arriving in the kitchen to see Harry's hands loosening their grip on the old man's wizened throat; Harry's horrified eyes staring at that ashen visage.

"What have you done, you idiot?"

"Killed him!" gasped Harry, and leaned horrified over the limp body that had slipped supinely to the floor and now lay motionless.

"Indeed?" asked a voice, smoothly, silkily, amusedly. "How very careless of you!"

Mason looked up. Without interrupting the long shaft of sunlight that fell through the open door, stood Lem Schwartz, his glistening teeth bared in a snarling smile so venomously vindictive, so maliciously triumphant, that Mason could not help the low exclamation of horror and repulsion that forced itself to his stiff lips.

Lem seemed trying, vainly, to bring his cruel mouth into a less triumphant expression, but at last he broke into a low, snarling chuckle, stretching his head forward until the lean long neck poked out like a vulture's over its prey.

"Don't flatter yourself, Lem. It's too early in the game," snapped Hardy sharply. "The old man's very much alive. . . . Harry, lift his feet and I'll get hold of his shoulders. So. . . . We'll get him up onto his bed."

Lem wheeled and strode away from the doorway. Mason, with a backward glance over his shoulder, gave a low, incredulous whistle. He realized now that Lem had stood in the pathway of the sunshine but a moment since and had thrown no shadow. And now, although the July day was blazingly bright, and long shadows stretched from barn and fences and trees, the fast-retreating form of Lem Schwartz owned no following shadow. . . .

THERE was no time to ponder over this, for old Eli had to be gotten up the stairs, and his heavy form, inert as it was, proved no easy burden for the two men. As it was near her door, the little girl called frantically: "Bring him in here! Please, Mr. Harry. Put him on my bed. Oh, gramper, gramper!"

Harry's face had not yet lost its ghastly pallor from the shock he had received in that moment when he had thought himself a murderer. As the blood flowed back into Eli's wrinkled face, and Eli's withered eyelids twitched with returning consciousness, the young Hebrew turned his dark, melancholy eyes upon the muscular hands that had so nearly committed a crime at the behest of his aroused anger.

"God of Israel, I thank Thee!" he breathed softly, his eyes closed for the moment of his involuntary prayer.

"Leave gramper with me," snorted Janie. "He's all right now, and I've got a lot to say to him. He's been getting into mischief, with me tied up here," said the little girl quaintly, "not able to keep an eye on him."

Smiling now, the two young men left old Baumann to his granddaughter's gentle ministrations, and went down into the

kitchen, Janie's cooing voice drifted after them softly.

"I'm hungry," announced Hardy, looking about him to see if there had been any breakfast preparations.

Harry looked troubled and flung a quick glance in the direction of the barn.

"Where are things?" Hardy continued.

Hesitating for a moment, Harry Epstein finally opened a cupboard and with obvious reluctance fished out a loaf of bread and the remains of the supper cheese. He found milk, sugar and cold coffee. Then he sat down opposite Mason and watched the other man start in with hearty appetite.

"I'd give a whole lot if I could eat those things the way you do," Harry burst out all at once with strange wistfulness.

Mason stared, frankly curious.

"And you mustn't tell any one that I gave you food this morning," went on the peddler, nervously. "Lem would——"

As if the mention of his name had been a conjuration, the gaunt form of the hired man strode in at the kitchen door. He strode across the room and snatched the half-eaten cheese sandwich out of Mason's fingers, flinging it from the doorway, where it was immediately seized upon by a pleased hen with loud cackles of surprize and appreciation.

"Tonight is the full of the moon!"

"But I'm hungry," objected Mason, resentfully.

The glass of coffee went into the sink with a crash. Dark and threatening was the mien Lem Schwartz turned upon the indignant young man.

"Save your appetite for tonight. For you shall eat . . . I promise you . . . such food as you have never tasted before. But until tonight, nothing must pass your lips."

Hardy's first impulse was to pick up the plate from the oilcloth-covered table and fling it at the speaker's head. His next was the opportune recollection of his errand to that place of mystery. He stood watchful, silent, quiescent, regarding Lem with speculative blue eyes that nevertheless smoldered.

"You, Epstein, shall remember your stupidity and disobedience tonight," menaced Lem, with venomous emphasis and a long, hard look from his glittering black eyes. "Tonight you shall eat what you and that other foolish one refused to eat a few weeks ago. . . ."

Harry Epstein caught at the edge of the table with hands that showed white about the knuckles.

"No!" he choked. "God of my Fathers, no! Not that!" His eyes were on those of his tormenter, as if he pleaded with one who he knew beforehand was obdurate and relentless.

Lem snarled. His great nose wrinkled like an angry dog's.

"Quite that," said he with cool insolence. "And *she* shall eat of it, also, to punish *you* for your rebellion."

"Not that poor girl! Have pity! Do what you will with me, but spare Selene!" begged Harry, and flung out his hands in Oriental abandon as he pleaded.

Lem regarded him sneeringly. "Well," he conceded, "we'll see how well you keep your watch over this fiddler until after tonight. He must make his initiate fasting," he ordered, and then was gone from the doorway.

Harry Epstein staggered over to a chair, sank into it and buried his face in his hands. Behind that inadequate shelter he sobbed like a heart-broken and terrified child. His agony shook Mason Hardy with apprehension of he knew not what.

7. "That devil's baptism in the pool. . . ."

DRAGGING minutes passed. Mason arose and put one hand on the sobbing man's shoulder, until Harry had finally managed to control himself. The young peddler wiped his eyes shamefacedly.

"Sorry to have made such a fool of myself, but it's thinking of Selene and poor Janie that's upsetting me. That little kid'll be the next one dragged into this accursed business, I'm afraid."

Mason's lips set hard before he spoke. "I've lost all patience, Harry, waiting to find out what this is about. What's the hold that rotten bluffer out there has over you people? Why am I to go without food today?"

"You must be desperately hungry tonight," whispered Harry. "After tonight, if the curse has fallen upon you . . . you'll eat . . . what Lem and Selene and I have been eating," he muttered thickly.

"Absurd," grunted Hardy skeptically. "I'm going to make a fresh sandwich," he announced determinedly.

Harry caught at his sleeve, detaining him in a kind of desperation.

"If you eat a single mouthful while you're in my charge, Lem will know it somehow; don't ask me why; I sometimes think he's the devil in person. And if he finds out, he will force Selene to eat . . . God of Israel, it is too much! I can not tell you the horror of it!"

He collapsed again into a little moaning heap, his shoulders heaving convulsively. Mason caught at him and shook him with a disgusted vigor.

"Don't be a simpleton! You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink, Harry. Lem can't force Selene to eat what she doesn't relish."

"You don't understand," moaned Harry.

"Then help me to understand!"

"Impossible. You would never believe me if I told you."

Mason snorted impatiently. "What, for instance, is this food that is so highly repugnant to you that the bare thought of eating it sends you into near hysterics?"

"I tell you, I dare not tell you. The whole situation is incredible. Half the time I don't believe it, myself. It is like a terrible nightmare. But—haven't you seen how thin Selene is?"

Mason thought of the full-faced girl whom he had seen pictured in his friend's house. It was undeniable that Selene's face had become very thin. Why, when he considered it, she was almost hollow-cheeked. . . .

"She's not eating regular food, because of the curse of that hell-water in the woods," explained Harry incoherently. "Raw flesh . . . of animals we catch in the woods . . . at night . . . is all she can digest . . . now."

Mason was exasperated, and showed it.

"Do you take me for an absolute idiot, Epstein, expecting me to swallow such wretched insinuation entire?" Even as he spoke, doubts assailed him. He remembered the glossy little black wolf, which had looked up pitifully at his window the preceding night, as if it had expected to see him looking down upon it. "My God!" he exploded. "Am I mad? Or are you?"

"I wish I knew," Harry said wearily. "The horrible side of this situation is that Lem is trying to force Selene and me yet deeper into his devil's clutches by making us eat . . . oh, God!" He gulped, shuddering violently, and went silent, his eyes avoiding the other man's penetrating gaze.

Mason acceded grimly: "You hunt rabbits and ground-hogs at night in the woods, and eat their raw flesh? Ugh! We'll let that pass for the moment. What

I wish to learn is, why are you and Selene under the evil domination of such a creature as Lem Schwartz?"

"That's just what I can't tell you . . . now, Mason. You'll know all tonight," sighed Harry, "without being told. One thing only I ask you: If you have any real pity for Selene Arkwright, you will fast until tonight. If you let food pass your lips today, Lem Schwartz will force Selene to eat . . . that . . . which will damn her soul for ever," Harry Epstein declared with a terrible and ominous gravity. "After tonight you will be at liberty to do what you please, within limits," he added hastily.

"I don't like it at all," Mason conceded, his head on one side as he listened subconsciously to the murmur of voices from Janie's room. "I think I'll have a talk with Selene."

"Don't flatter yourself that she'll tell you more than I have," said the peddler sharply. "She's trying to make herself believe that she's the victim of bad dreams; nightmares of terrible and incredible vividness," he shuddered.

Lowering his voice cautiously, Mason inquired: "Where were you and Selene and Lem, last night?"

The young Jew paled as he stared back at the other man.

"You—you did look from the window, then, as she told you? What—what did you see?" he jerked out tensely.

"I saw three wolves returning from the chase, Epstein. And there was nobody in that other house, because I——"

"You dared go there?" groaned Harry. "Then . . . you know?"

"I know that I'm a victim of the same kind of nightmare you seem to be afflicted with," replied Mason grimly.

"Did you . . . did you find remains . . . of half-devoured——?"

Mason looked queerly at the young Jew's eager, pleading, yet anxious face.

"Don't you know, yourself?" he asked pointedly in reply.

"We never go downstairs there in daytime," Harry explained. "If we have to go to our rooms, we go through that upper door in the upper hall. And . . . and the odor," he cried out in a wild but guarded voice, "makes me afraid——"

"The other side of this house was empty last night," Mason pronounced with finality. "I don't know yet just what evil and incredibly horrible things are going on in this accursed spot, but downstairs I found," and his nostrils contracted with disgust, "decaying bits of furry skin and bloody, dried flesh, and half-gnawed bones of animals. . . ."

"Then it isn't a dream! It's true!" exclaimed the peddler, and jumped to his feet in such nervous agitation that Mason grasped his arms and shook him forcibly to constrain him into some semblance of self-control. "Then it's true! That damnable devil's baptism in the quarry pool——" his voice died away into silence, as his eyes darted this way and that to avoid Mason's keen glance.

"Go on, Epstein. Now I must know the rest," he ordered, grimly.

The peddler shook his head. His eyes were wild.

"Tonight is the full of the moon. If you have fallen under the curse, you'll know the worst tonight. If you haven't, you can leave here tomorrow, unless Lem manages to give you that devil's baptism of his, somehow."

Mason changed tactics abruptly. "From what you said to old Baumann a short time past, I infer that he knows how to remove the spell, or whatever it is that holds you here."

Harry nodded sullenly. "Yes, but he won't stir to remove it."

"Why not?"

"Would you, if you had to give up your life voluntarily, knowing that the devil would get your soul when you died?" was the astonishing reply.

Mason's stare was incredulous. "You people sure have been well hypnotized," he asserted.

Harry laughed hardly. "And how about you, who found three empty rooms, and saw three wolves returning from the chase with their prey?"

"Lem or old Eli must have put it over me, too," Mason admitted with reluctance. "But from now on I shall be on my guard, to maintain mental and spiritual supremacy." Despite his attempt to make his voice and words assured, there was no convincing quality there, and he knew it.

Janie's voice broke the ensuing silence. "Gramper, is what Mr. Harry says true?"

"Janie! Janie! I did it for you! Don't ask me more!" moaned the broken voice of old Eli.

"Can you un-hypnotize them, by jumping into the quarry pool?" demanded the little girl's voice, with sharp persistence. "Is Miss Selene staying here because she's hypnotized and not because she loves to teach me things?" Her voice, in turn, broke pitifully.

"Janie! Janie!" The old man's cry was monotonously the same.

"Lem Schwartz is mixed up in this, isn't he, gramper? That's why you're so afraid of him," declared the child with a flash of that uncanny insight which Father Paul had divined. "And if you went into the quarry pool, Miss Selene could go away? Oh, I want her to stay!" suddenly sobbed Janie childishly. "She's so sweet to me. I just love Miss Selene."

"Janie! Don't cry, gramper's little girl! Miss Selene shan't go, while you want her here. Lem promised me that, when I gave him my word——" he broke off abruptly.

"When you promised him what, gramper?" demanded the little girl, cleverly seizing upon those pregnant words. "What did you promise him? You'd better tell me. I'll find out anyway, if you don't. I'll ask Lem myself," she threatened.

"Oh, no, Janie! You mustn't ask Lem anything," wailed old Eli in abject terror. "He's not fit to be near you."

"Why not, gramper? We don't need him around here, anyway. I'm going to ask Harry to be our hired man," Janie announced with serenity. "He'd be lots better than that scowling old Lem. So you can send Lem to me, and I'll tell him he can go."

"He won't go, Janie. He . . . don't you see, I can't tell him to go? I've promised him he can stay, until——" and here the old man's voice broke off in a wild and moaning incoherent outburst, which he evidently tried to smother among Janie's quilts.

The child's uncanny intuition played her true. "You've told him he can stay until you bathe in the pool, haven't you, gramper? Well, then, it seems to me you'll have to do it."

"God in heaven! Janie, no! You don't understand what that would mean. Lem would take my soul if I did that. I'd be for ever damned into hell!"

"Gramper, I just don't believe any such silliness," declared the child's clear voice contemptuously. "You've let yourself get all excited over that ugly Lem Schwartz, as if he were the devil in person. He doesn't do any work; you've told me that yourself. He just goes prowling around the woods trying to find

trespassers. He hardly ever helps you with the farm work.

"Now, Harry would be another kind of hired man. His hands are so strong, gramper, and his heart is so kind. And he loves farm work. He's told me so, himself," she added in a lower tone, singular sweetness in her accents; it was as if she were smiling happily to herself.

"Janie, it's no use your talking. I can't send Lem away. If I tell him to go, I must give up my life and soul to him in exchange for those others. . . . Can't you understand?"

"I understand that that is what you think, gramper. But I don't believe it for a minute myself," the little girl retorted. "What I'd like to know is, why did you let Lem think you so silly?"

"I did it for you, Janie. For you. . . ."

"Gramper! For me? What good would your silliness do me?"

(Father Paul had been right, thought Mason, straining his ears so as not to miss a word of that pregnant conversation. Janie was indeed the key to the whole situation.)

"Janie, I wanted you to be amused, and have company, while you were lying here helpless. And I hadn't money to pay anybody. I couldn't even feed them, even if they stayed here for nothing. The farm hardly pays just to keep us two; I'm too old to work it."

"So you let Lem live here and hypnotize people so that they'd stay with me?" demanded Janie. "What, gramper, who wants people that *have* to stay with them?" In Janie's voice was more than a hint of mortified tears. "I thought Miss Selene wanted to stay. And Harry. . . . Oh, how could you have been so silly?"

"Don't cry, gramper's little girl! Gramper can't bear to have you cry," begged old Eli, voice quavering.

"Lem must go away, gramper," said the child imperatively.

"Janie, I can't send him."

There was a long silence.

Harry's eyes lifted to Mason's flashing blue orbs, and in that dark gaze Mason fancied he read thoughts too closely allied to violence. He shook his head at Harry, imposing further silence with uplifted, warning finger.

"We won't talk about it any more just now, gramper," Janie went on, in a tranquil voice but with an elaborate casualness that stirred Mason oddly. "I think I want to be alone now. I have a lot of thinking to do."

A moment later old Eli's dragging footsteps sounded in the upper hallway. Mason seized the young Jew's sleeve and jerked him out of the lower room and into the front yard.

8. *"Dare use that Name again, and see what'll happen to you. . . ."*

"I'VE got to find Selene, Harry."

"To tell her her dreams aren't nightmares but horrid realities?" demurred Harry in bitter reproach. "She's still trying to deceive herself."

The other man scowled thoughtfully. "H-m-m. Seems there's nothing to do then but wait for tonight and the full of the moon."

"If these hideous nightmares are realities, Mason, will you get Father Paul to come down, after you return?" asked Harry, after a moment's painful silence. "He's the only one who can help us. I have a strong feeling that he understands something of what has been going on here. He warned me when he was down a couple of days ago, against letting Lem force me into . . . into joining that . . . devil's orgy."

"So you confided in Father Paul, who came and went, and you don't see fit to

tell me, who am here to take my chances with you?"

"But you see . . . he . . . knew. He . . . asked me . . . where the missing child was," whispered Harry, head hanging dejectedly.

"No! Impossible. . . . Horrible. . . ." Sick horror seized upon Mason as he remembered Father Paul's words. ("And the missing child?" Father Paul had said, with such a strange intonation.)

"Don't look at me like that!" exclaimed the young Jew wildly. "I had nothing to do with it. Neither had Selene. It was Lem who brought the child here. God of my fathers, was it a dream? He tried to make us join him in his horrid feasting, but Selene refused. He . . . bit her on the shoulder. Oh, it *is* true. It is no dream . . . Janie bandaged that shoulder the morning after," he added in a sick whisper.

"Man, man, get hold of yourself," admonished Hardy sternly. He was ghastly sick with nausea and loathing, for Harry's words had brought back vividly the fetid stench of those downstairs rooms in the other house, as well as the bits of decaying flesh and the half-gnawed bones. Then he cried out in protest:

"That devil actually brought a live child here? And . . . and devoured it? Why, that isn't possible! It's absolutely incredible!"

Then it was Harry's turn to quiet him. "Don't let Lem hear you. You don't know yet what he's capable of. If he were to realize that you came here purposely to spy upon him . . . oh, for pity's sake, don't cry out so loudly!"

Mason controlled himself with a mighty effort. "I'm going in there tomorrow," he said, brow contracted, teeth set grimly. "I'm going to clean up all that mess . . . and . . . bury those bones somewhere . . . and put a mark over . . . over the grave. A child! That devil! . . . A child!"

"You see how mere words have moved you," Harry murmured despondently. "Yet Selene and I have been constrained night after night by we know not what fearful force from without ourselves to go into the forest with that . . . that devil . . . and hunt wild creatures, to satisfy our hunger. We are still . . . calm," but a tremor in his voice belied the bravery of his words. "If you intend to get through this night and keep your sanity and help Selene, you'll have to put everything out of your mind now, or you'll go mad, the way I've thought more than once that I would," he finished, and groaned.

DOOMED thus to fasting and inactivity, there was nothing for it but to let the hours slip past. Stretched under the black walnut tree that shaded the front of the Baumann farmhouse, the two men lay in silence on the grass, watching the hot July sun's progress across the sky and its final decline into the west.

Tomorrow, Mason cogitated, Earl Baker and Father Paul would arrive, demanding to see him in person. Tomorrow he himself would know how successful had been Lem's incredible powers over himself. Dream and reality seemed so confusingly close to each other that Mason almost welcomed the moment when the red sun disappeared behind the hilltop, leaving a rosy glow in the sky, and Lem Schwartz strode down from the barn, a hideous and sardonic grin distorting his lean countenance as he beckoned the two men with claw-like finger.

"Hush! Say nothing. It would only make it worse for us all," whispered Harry in agitated warning.

Mason stretched cramped limbs and followed Lem into the Baumann kitchen, where the hired man stood at the foot of

the stairs, the handle of the communicating door in one hand. The red sky was reflected luridly in those deep-set eyes that peered ominously from beneath their shaggy brows. His gaze went significantly to Harry.

"Selene!" called Harry, as if in obedience to some esoteric message. "We're waiting."

"Coming," answered the girl's voice from above. "Janie, let go my skirt, dear. I have to be going."

"I don't want you to go," replied Janie's determined voice. "Why should you run away in the middle of this lovely story? It leaves me all alone. Just gramper, and he can't read the way you do."

"Let go my dress, Janie. Let go, dear. You don't understand. I *have* to go."

There was an exasperated exclamation. Selene came to the head of the stairs, pausing to tuck a breadth of skirt under her blouse, where Janie's disrespectful and demanding little hands had ripped it apart.

"The sun has set. Hurry! Why are you waiting?" urged old Eli's trembling, importunate voice in agitation.

Mason's face showed irritation as he looked at the old farmer, whose bent form wavered as he leaned against the oilcloth-covered table, set now for one. . . . Selene drew in a long, quivering breath, and came slowly down the stairs.

"The sun has gone down! God in heaven. . . ."

With a snarl as of a savage beast, Lem wheeled upon the old man. His nose seemed longer and larger than ever. To Mason it was as if the bushy eyebrows had straggled down the high cheek-bones hairily, like a thicket from behind which those garnet-gleaming eyes glared fiercely. The hand that the hired man lifted to hurry Selene through the door into the other house looked gray and shaggy in the fast-fading light. The fingers seemed pointed together, like a great nailed paw.

"Dare to use that Name again!" said a thick voice darkly.

"I'm coming! Don't touch me, Lem! I'm coming, I tell you," cried out the girl in an outburst of terror. She shrank from that hateful contact, her lips tightening unpleasantly over her teeth, so that her whole aspect altered subtly.

Mason took one of her limp hands in his and followed Harry into the next house. In the tiny hallway he hesitated, until Harry's hand urged him up the stairs.

"You can share my room," said the peddler in a low tone.

Lem had lingered in the doorway below. Mason strained his ears to hear whatever was passing between the hired man and old Baumann.

"Dare use that Name again," Lem was snarling viciously, "and see what'll happen to you . . . and *yours*," pointedly.

"Janie! Oh, Janie! What have I done? What have I done?"

The only response was a bestial growl, so startling in character that Mason, gently assisting Selene up the dark staircase, stopped short in astonishment. The door slammed; old Eli's key could be heard, hastily securing him from unexpected invasion from their side of the house. Harry's hand reached down and pulled at Mason urgently.

"Be quick!"

Selene had apparently regained her poise. Arrived at the upper hallway, she ran into her room with a hurried goodnight, and her door closed. The bolt slipped into place rustily.

"This way," directed Harry, with an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. "Hurry! Lem warned me never to linger at this hour between dusk and dark. It's . . . dangerous." He pushed Mason

ahead of him into the room, closed the door and shut the bolt. His finger went to his lips in warning.

There came a sound of padding footsteps on the staircase. Then a low whine. A scratching at Selene's door. Then those clicking nails . . . padding paws . . . went down the stairs again.

"I'll go to his room now," whispered Harry in a cautious undertone. "Bolt this door when I go out. No, don't detain me. I have no time now to explain, even if this *is* only a dream. There'll be plenty of light soon, from the moon," Harry offered vaguely.

He unbolted the door, slipped out quietly, and pulled it to behind him.

MASON pushed in the bolt. He was glad the flashlight was in his pocket, for it might perhaps serve him now, although the moonlight gave unmistakable signs of shortly flooding the room with its pallid light. As this light became stronger and brighter, there came odd rustlings and scratchings and soft whinings from the rooms on either side of him. He held his breath; he could have sworn that Selene had cautiously drawn the bolt of her door. This was more than his curiosity could stand; he opened his own with painstaking care, quietly lifting the latch of the door until he could look out through a narrow crack into the upper hallway.

Through Selene's open door the moonlight fell in a broad swath, and in the midst of that uncanny brilliance cowered a glossy black creature that slunk, belly to the board floor, toward the staircase. At the top of the flight it hesitated as if reluctant, turning its pointed head backward over furry shoulders. In his astonishment, for he thought he recognized the black wolf of the preceding night, Mason let his door slip from his hands. It flew open, outlining him as he stood against the flooding moonshine.

The glowing eyes of the black wolf fell upon him. It gave utterance to a low, pitiful, whining cry. Almost in the same moment, another door opened, and a large brown wolf bounded out, stopping short at sight of Mason in the doorway. The fur bristled on its body; it growled, but stood stock-still, glaring at young Hardy with its redly scintillating eyes.

It seemed to Mason that hours passed while he stood there motionless, daring to make no slightest movement lest it might precipitate an attack from one or the other of the two wolves. From the kitchen below came a call, a long-drawn-out, importunate whine. As if that sound had broken the spell holding all three creatures like statues, the black wolf fled down into the darkness, followed closely by the bristling brown beast.

Mason sprang across the hall and glanced into Selene's room; it was empty. No occupant was in Lem's room, either. Mason was back in a flash to Harry's room, bolting the door. He sprang to the window, breathing hard as he told himself that it was all a too-vivid dream.

As they had done on the previous night, the three wolves emerged and trotted toward the woods; the long, gaunt gray . . . the big brown . . . and the slim black one. As they sped across the moonlit landscape, the black one deliberately paused under the window and looked up at Mason again. Then it, too, disappeared into the forest shades. The wolf-pack's raucous cry rose on the still night air.

9. *"The mirror reflected a thing that did not lie before it. . . ."*

A STRANGE and disturbing sensation diverted Mason's attention to himself, all at once. His mind was drawn absolutely away, for the moment, from

those savage, ominous howls from the woods. With unpleasant suddenness he realized that his left foot and leg were prickling painfully, as if they had "gone to sleep." A vigorous stamp to restore circulation moved him to a cry of amazement and dismay, for when he stamped, the tan oxford at the extremity of his left leg flew from the foot and across the room, striking the opposite wall and dropping behind Harry's tumbled bed.

Also, Mason completely lost his balance; went heavily on the floor on his back. As he instinctively flung his head forward to save it from the severe blow it must otherwise have sustained, he beheld a strange, an incredible sight. His right foot was neatly clad in silk sock and well-polished tan oxford, but the sock on the left foot was wrinkled, slipping; the oxford had already flown through the air. As he went down, the limp sock followed the shoe.

Mason Hardy lay on the floor a full sixty seconds before he dared raise himself to a sitting posture and hitch into full moonlight for another look at what he felt he simply could not have seen, because it was altogether too incredible. He closed his eyes, blinked them rapidly once or twice, then opened them directly upon that prickling left foot and leg. The blue eyes widened amazedly then, for what he saw only too plainly was the slim, hairy leg of an animal, with a well-padded nailed paw at the extremity.

He closed his eyes with a snap; opened them again; fixed them incredulously upon that impossible sight. Then he touched one finger gingerly to that strange appendage. It was rough and hairy. Sight and touch concurred in their messages to his bewildered, horrified consciousness.

With some difficulty he got to his feet, for this strange leg bent under him disagreeably, in the wrong direction; he could hardly straighten it enough to stand upright. The old priest had been right, quite right; Evil Incarnate was rampant on the Baumann farm. And Mason Hardy, in his friendly endeavor to be of service to his old college chum, had come into direct contact with that Destruction that Walked at Noonday, as Father Paul had hinted so broadly.

Meantime, the pallid moon had climbed the sky. Louder, nearer, came the cry of the weird wolf-pack, altering strangely and subtly in tone. A rushing of padded feet . . . a whimpering wail. Mason went leaping in awkward bounds to the window; that last cry had come from no wild beast; it had sounded like a frightened child. At the thought, his blood ran cold; horror clutched him. His body pimpled pricklingly with goose-flesh.

Scratching . . . whining . . . snarling . . . growls . . . below.

In Mason's mind now stood out, like letters of flame, those final words of Father Paul: "Evil can not utterly triumph as long as there is the slightest effort to hold on to Good."

The young man took the automatic from his pocket, unbolted the door, and stumbled uncertainly across the upper hall, metamorphosed foot and leg hindering him dangerously. Down the stairs, holding to the stair rails; going sidewise to keep from falling . . . God, how terrible to be handicapped at such a moment by that wolf-like limb! . . .

THE door in the tiny hall below was open into the kitchen. Mason peered cautiously around the corner, from which he could see through into the parlor. At what his eyes beheld, he could with difficulty restrain his lips from the cry that pushed impetuously to them. He was looking directly upon the cowering form of the black wolf, trembling there upon

the board floor. Beyond the beast stood the great pier-glass. And in that glass . . . the mirror showed no wolf. The mirror reflected a thing that did not seem to lie before it. What the wide blue eyes of young Hardy beheld was the white, crouching body of a girl, half concealed by streaming black hair, as she trembled there in a spasm of obvious revulsion and fear.

Almost paralyzed at the weird paradox of what lay before the mirror, and what the glass reflected, Mason found himself incapable, for the time being, of any movement. He could only stand, staring and listening.

Another beast farther back in the room snarled. The nailed paws came clicking across the boards, and presently into his field of vision slouched the brown wolf, head pushed down against its own furry breast, as if to hide its eyes. Another ferocious growl, and the gaunt gray beast bounded across, snapping viciously at the brown. The brown animal recoiled, snarling, lips back from bared teeth. And all the time the little black wolf kept up a continuous pitiful whining, as it cowered against the floor; while in the mirror was reflected that shuddering, quivering white body. . . .

For a moment the gray wolf glared upon the other two, drawn lips tight against glistening, slavering teeth. Then it bounded back. When it returned, it held something white between those pointed fangs . . . something that wailed weakly, impotently, pitifully.

Mason Hardy could not check the gasping cry that now surged upward from his throat. The spell of horror that had until this moment held him petrified, broke. He made a clumsy leap into the middle of the kitchen; another that carried him staggering into the parlor.

With a smothered snarl of mingled surprize and fury, the gaunt gray wolf leaped backward, dropping its screaming burden. Mason caught up the infant and began an awkward retreat. The gray's threatening jaws opened as that gaunt beast slunk menacingly after him. A crisis seemed imminent; then the brown wolf sprang, crouching in the gray's way, its tail switching from side to side, a long snarl threatening the other beast.

Mason directed his automatic at the glowing garnet orbs of the gray, and backed away until he had reached the staircase. He would have drawn the door to, when a sudden rush . . . a whining, pitiful cry . . . gave him pause. The little black wolf had crept swiftly after him and was crouching abjectly at his feet, looking up with almost human intelligence in its dog-like, piteous eyes.

Mason Hardy remembered the paradox of the mirror. He backed up one step, permitting the black wolf to pass him on the stairs, and pulled the door to. He was just in time. He had one whirling, dizzy glimpse of the other two beasts, engaged in frightful struggle, as the brown disputed the gray's advance. They flung themselves together upon the closed door, which rattled perilously as if the latch would spring open any minute. Mason would have bolted it, but bolt there was none; so up the stairs he stumbled in haste.

He hammered on the communicating door, while against it leaned, whining fearfully, the little black wolf, eyes rolling whitely in the darkness. The young man's heart beat irregularly with pity and apprehension as he listened to the hellhounds' uproar below. Also the child in his arms continued to scream lustily. At any minute the fight would be decided, and the staircase invaded. He struck the door imperatively with the butt

of his automatic and shouted for admittance.

Scuffling and exclamations on the other side. . . . The old man's voice, raised shrilly: "No, Janie, no!" Janie's voice, hard with some passionate emotion. . . . The key turned briskly. The door opened. Mason almost fell into the other house, the salvaged infant shrieking in his arms. In good time. The door below swung wide, and clicking feet scrambled up the stairs. The young man flung his weight against the door, pushing the bolt and then turning the key.

It was only when safety was assured that he became aware of the miracle. Barefooted, clad only in her little white night-robe, Janie stood, her eyes wide with incredulous amazement at her own feat. She was balancing on her long-unused limbs with the airy fluttering of an uneasy butterfly, but there was no uncertainty in the starry light of her eyes, despite the expression of questioning fear on her childish face.

Her eyes fell in astonishment upon the black wolfish form cowering at Mason's feet. With a startled exclamation, she turned back toward her room, paused, and cried out again sharply. In the mirror opposite her open door, Janie had seen what Mason also saw as the child cried out . . . the shuddering white form of Selene Arkwright, shielded solely by long black hair. Janie on her little unsteady white feet was into the room and out again, dragging a quilt after her. With a tenderness beyond her years, she laid this covering about the wolfish form cowering on the floor.

"Come with me, dear Miss Selene!" cried she, and tugged at the glossy black head of the beast fearlessly. "Oh, whatever have you wicked men been doing to Miss Selene?" She stood in the doorway of her room, supporting her slender body against the door-frame. "All of you are devils!"

Old Eli stood staring stupidly, jaw dropped. One shaking finger wagged at the infant, still shrieking lustily in Mason's arms.

"Give that baby to me this instant!" commanded Janie imperatively. "Oh, gramper, I don't exactly understand what Lem's been trying to do here, but he's going to leave tomorrow," she announced with definiteness. "Now that I can walk, I know how to drive him away," she added mysteriously, as she slipped back into her room.

The door closed upon her and the black wolf, but her flashing backward glance carried strange import to Mason's now keenly awakened intuition.

"Janie! Janie!" wept the old man piteously, outstretched hands groping after that retreating figure that had been so triumphant in its yet uneasy carriage, so dominated by the child's strange spirit.

"Tomorrow there's going to be a showdown," declared Hardy, staring down at his strangely altered limb. Cold fury stirred him. "Whatever you've been up to, old man, your deviltry's going to stop."

Old Eli whimpered weakly. He was bent over, listening now to the wicked snarls on the other side of that upper door. His body shook as if with an attack of ague. "Nothing . . . I've done nothing," he protested, whining.

"Look at this leg of mine!" snapped Hardy. "Don't tell me you haven't some idea of how it got this way. I have my suspicions, old man. Tomorrow you'll walk the plank into that pool and get an all-over bath. Understand?"

"No! Oh, no!" shrieked old Eli, cowering in abject fear, his head going down into his shaking hands. "Oh God, no!"

Mason's laugh was hard and bitter.

"You're going in. I'll see to it myself. There's something hellish about that pool, and if the rest of us are infected, you're going to get your dose, too."

A long moan, that quavered off into silence. Old Eli went down on the floor in a trembling, abject heap. Janie's door opened.

"What are you doing to gramper? Let him alone, I tell you. I know all about it. I made him tell me. I can make it come right. . . . Poor gramper, don't be afraid," she murmured tenderly, like a young mother to her fearful child. "Janie'll make it all right."

The child's eyes flung at Mason Hardy the menace that might lie in the shining orbs of a tigress protecting her young, as she looked proudly at him across that crouched, quaking, fear-stricken old man.

"You let him alone. You hear?"

Mason laughed. He turned his back on the child, and approached the communicating door, now safely bolted and locked, but against which leaped heavy bodies with snarls and growls. He struck it with the butt of his automatic.

"Keep away, or I'll shoot through the wood," he shouted. "If you are what I suspect, you'll understand. I give you sixty seconds to get away from here."

The snarls ceased. Presently he heard the clicking of nailed claws as the beasts retired downstairs. A soft whining sounded from the landing a moment later. Intuition told him that the brown wolf had returned and was begging for entry, but he dared not open the door to it. Whatever it might be, other than wolf, it must fend for itself that one night.

10. *"It was the Sacred Wafer. . . ."*

THE young man spent the remainder of the night alone in the kitchen, for Janie soon prevailed upon her grandfather to go to bed. The light of a kerosene lamp made the room cheery, and Mason spent those wee, small hours putting together the pieces of the puzzle to which he now felt he held a key. But daylight was to bring upon him much which he had not calculated. With daybreak the communicating downstairs door was flung open, and Harry Epstein, followed closely by the saturnine Lem, ugly eyes filled with unholy lights, came running into the Baumann kitchen.

Lem advanced upon the young man, great hairy fists clenching and unclenching. His glowing eyes fixed the young man's resentful gaze with malevolent confidence and power.

"You would mix up in my business, eh?" snarled Lem, shoving his furious countenance up against that of Mason Hardy. "Well, since you've asked for what you're going to get, we'll have it over with at once. I don't want any nonsense on this farm from now on."

The look he shot at old Eli, who had come tottering down the stairs, sent the old man shrinking back against the wall, uplifted hands shaking as if to hold off some horrid specter.

"It's certainly time something was done," agreed Mason, endeavoring with difficulty to maintain an icy calm. "This morning you are going to pack up and get off this place, for good."

Lem flung his head back, uttering as he did so a loud, grating laugh.

"I'm leaving, eh? Well, you'll have to make me go, then. And you wouldn't care to have a fight and a fuss, with a woman in the house, little fiddler, would you? I'll fight you, poor fool, but not here."

Harry Epstein was shouting: "Don't go out into the woods, Mason! Don't go into the woods! Keep away from the pool!"

"Shut *your* mouth," ground out Lem,

with a slow turn of his furious eyes upon the young Hebrew that was somehow more terrible, more menacing, than a quicker movement would have been, for it betrayed Lem's complete confidence in his own supremacy. "Come along, since you must let me batter you before I give you your baptism in the pool!"

He shot out of the house door and was off into the woods, without glancing behind him. It was as if he knew well that he would be followed.

"Don't go, Mason! Don't let him entice you near the pool," again begged Harry, trying to hold the other man by the sleeve.

Hardy thrust those fingers away gently but firmly.

"My dear fellow, you can't dissuade me. Why, that fellow's sheer devil! Do you think I could go away in safety, before having a whack at him? I'm a pretty fair boxer. I may have a good chance to give him his just deserts."

Harry nodded. His eyes were humid. He stood back resignedly.

"If I can't get the better of him, I'll throw *myself* into the pool," exclaimed Hardy, kindling. "Better that, than to be tossed in by him, and I've about figured it out that a voluntary sacrifice will break the spell for you others."

He flung out of the house, hardly realizing that the hindering metamorphosis of the preceding night had disappeared. Harry followed more slowly.

As the young Jew ran lightly down the path to the woods, he heard hoof-beats. He stopped to look back. A horse and buggy were coming along the lane. The horse was plump and gray, and apparently not at all pleased at feeling the unaccustomed whip now flicking its sides, for it gave occasional little resentful jumps as it half trotted, half balkily walked, along. Harry turned back. He knew Father Paul's outfit. As he approached, he recognized also the pale, harassed face of Earl Baker.

"Where are they?" called the priest anxiously, as Harry came within speaking distance.

"Lem and Mason have gone into the woods to fight it out," Harry explained.

"Holy Mother!" ejaculated the priest piously, and gave the astonished gray horse such a stroke as that plump hide had never experienced before. The beast jumped and set off at a clumsy gallop. Harry ran after the buggy, caught at the back, and managed to hang on as the vehicle bumped and bounced over the ruts of the country lane.

As they passed the Baumann house, two figures emerged, but Harry did not see them. He was by far too seriously occupied, retaining his hold on that jouncing vehicle. Nor did he see a taxi that came slowly down the lane behind.

At the verge of the quarry pool Father Paul reined up the gray nag and sprang out, horse-whip in hand, righteous indignation burning in his usually kindly eyes. He walked toward the two struggling figures by now engaged in a deadly clinch, swinging and swaying as each in turn strove to throw the other into the strange waters that sparkled, and surged, and leaped up at the rocky verge where they were fighting.

Behind the good priest came Earl Baker, frantic with the apprehensions that had been making such inroads upon him.

"Hold him, Mason! I'll be with you in a moment!" Earl was shouting wildly.

Father Paul found no opportunity to use his horse-whip, so interlaced were those tense figures that hardly seemed to move, strained as they were, each against the other.

And so it was Harry only who glimpsed the slender white form that sprang straight out through the air, plunging into the pool despite Selene Arkwright's frantic attempts to prevent Janie's unexpected action. It was Harry who again came to the rescue of a woman, and flung himself into the gurgling waters, swimming frantically in the direction of that little, poignant face that had gone under, come floating up, and disappeared once more.

Father Paul, whirling at Harry's outcry and the ensuing splash as the young Jew's body struck the pool's sparkling waters, reached into a fold of his clothes and brought out a folded napkin. With his left hand he scattered the contents of the napkin onto the surface of the pool, while his right hand made the sign of the cross over the greedy, lapping ripples.

The moving waters broke into a foaming fury that for a moment flashed over the two heads now appearing together. Old Eli had reached the scene; his wild cry of utter despair brought a vindictive and scornful smile to the face of Lem Schwartz, who now flung off his opponent easily, for Mason's attention had been diverted by the things happening so swiftly about the pool. As the waters subsided, Harry swam vigorously with one arm, drawing the pale little Janie to safety. Willing hands aided her to land. Lem, gleaming orbs rolling from one to the other of the assembled company, had begun to draw his dark, saturnine face into a heavy scowl. Apparently things were not entirely to his liking.

"Go!" Father Paul ordered bruskly, pointing into the depths of the forest with imperative gesture, and facing the malevolent grin of Lem with intrepid courage.

"Too late, Father. If I go now, these others are bound to go with me," sneered Lem.

"That isn't true!" shrilled Janie excitedly. "I jumped into the water to save them all. You can't touch them now, Lem."

In beast-like fashion he snarled at her, then laughed horridly.

"I can't touch them now, Janie, my dear, thanks to you. But you have put yourself in their place, of your own free will." He made a quick step toward her.

Harry Epstein, white and fearfully afraid but dauntless, stood in his way. "One finger on Janie, and I'll pull your eyes out, you devil!" he ground out. Janie shrank against her defender for a moment, then drew herself away and went trembling to meet the grinning Lem, who held out his arms to her with mock invitation of welcome.

"No, Janie, no!" cried Harry.

"Yes, Harry, I must. It is what has saved you. And Miss Selene. I belong to him now, instead of all of you."

Lem shouted, a berserker burst of triumph. He put out one ugly, hairy hand. Janie shrank, shuddering. She closed her eyes.

Then Father Paul's horse-whip cut down sharply upon that dark and evil hand, and Lem's scream of astonishment and pain followed upon its whistling errand.

"You can not touch that dear child," asserted Father Paul with calm confidence.

"Indeed? You'll see how she shall suffer for this," Lem began, darkly menacing.

FATHER PAUL'S calm gaze left Lem's face and shifted to the pool. Lem also looked. Something like dismay and incredulity passed across his lowering visage.

"It was the sacred wafer," said Father Paul quietly. "The water is itself again. The spell was broken, while those two were in the water."

Harry ran forward and pulled Janie's drooping form into his arms. His exclamation was one of incredulous joy.

"Then Janie is all right? And Selene? And I? God of my Fathers, how good Thou art!"

Lem Schwartz turned, grinding his teeth audibly, and gave vent to an ugly laugh. His fists were clenched with impotent fury as he slouched along the side of the pool.

A loud, hoarse voice hailed him as he slunk off.

"Wait a minute, feller. You ain't gettin' off as easy as you might be thinkin'," cried the taxi-driver, coming around the side of the pool at a run. "Where's my little Jacky, huh?"

Lem's shoulders shook with sardonic merriment. His dark face distorted with a convulsion of malevolent triumph.

"You'll find his clothes back at Eli's farm," he shouted. "The wolves ate him." And he suddenly gave vent to howling laughter, flinging his head back like a wild beast about to call his mates to the kill.

The unshaven face of the driver was so dark that Father Paul's heart trembled at sight of it. "Stop! Think what you're doing!" cried the good man hastily, foreseeing the next action of Jacky's grief-infuriated father.

"Yeah? I've done my thinkin' a piece past, Father. What I'm goin' to do now is actin'," and with that he launched himself upon Lem's back and by sheer weight of his surprize attack staggered the sinister being so that he lost his balance completely.

"Back to hell with you, you devil, where you belong!" shouted the taxi-driver, recovering himself just in time to avoid going over the edge of the rock into the pool, which now, with a mighty splash, received the dark form of Lem Schwartz.

Father Paul had held up one hand to delay the involuntary movement of Mason Hardy. "No, my son, this matter is in other hands than ours. That man——"

He was interrupted by Lem's body striking the pool. A sudden thick and noisome cloud of stinking smoke arose from the water . . . obscured the vision momentarily . . . cleared.

"——that man, if man he was," continued Father Paul serenely, "is better left to his own devices. If he were an illusion of the deceived senses——"

"Why, there's nothing there!" cried Hardy, astonished. He was bending over the water, and the clear limpidity of the pool now showed every detail of its rocky bottom distinctly. Nowhere could be seen the leering face of that strange entity that had called itself Lem Schwartz.

"It was the sacred wafer, my children," said Father Paul softly. "The powers of evil could not combat the forces for good that lie behind that blessed symbol. The Destruction that Walketh at Noonday need no longer be feared."

In Earl's arms stood Selene, her face hidden against his shoulder. Janie, very happy, leaned on Harry's solicitously supporting arms; one of her hands was in Eli's; the old man was crying. Across these passed the good priest's glance, very tenderly. His eyes met Mason's. The two men smiled understandingly at each other:

" 'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world'," quoted Father Paul, and nodded contentedly.

"Our horrified eyes had just a glimpse of a hairy black shape, a nightmare figure about to leap."

Black Invocation

By PAUL ERNST

The story of a frightful elemental evoked by the chanting of an old Latin formula

MY TELEPHONE rang one night about a month ago, and on the wire was Bryce Woodward.

"Have you time for some psychic investigating this evening?" he asked me.

"More mediums?" I countered. On several occasions I have gone out with Bryce to visit psychic mediums whose powers were confined to tricks with mirrors, hollow tables and sound amplifiers.

"No," said Bryce, "this is something different. Another experiment with invocation. Want to indulge?"

"I suppose so," I said.

"All right. I'll be over in half an hour to get you. I'll explain then."

In less than the designated half-hour he was at my door, his dark eyes shining with a light half of eagerness and half of amusement.

A word here concerning Bryce Woodward: A young man with an inherited income, he has entertained himself since leaving college with studies of things psychic, supernatural and abnormal. Rather, he has entertained himself by exposing alleged demonstrations of those things as fakes. And I, interested from a professional viewpoint inasmuch as I am a beginning medico with a pathological bent, have often gone with him. For the rest, Bryce is tall and very dark, with a sparsely bearded but virile-looking face in which, under heavy eyebrows that have a sort of Satanic slant, are set deep, dark eyes. A good fellow, though inclined to be a bit mysterious and secretive.

"We're going back to Sixth Century Rome," he began his explanation, while I was getting my hat and locking up my combination office and living-apartment. "You know that old parchment work on demonology I picked up in Paris two years ago?"

I nodded. "The fragment that instructs students in Black Magic on how to call up devils and things? Yes, I remember it."

"Well, we're going to work with that," said Bryce.

I recalled one whole evening we had spent—"with that"—in pronouncing solemnly aloud certain mystic words in Latin guaranteeing to call weird and marvelous beings from their haunts in the outer-world. No weird or marvelous beings had replied.

"Tonight will be different," said Bryce, when I reminded him of our failure.

We left my apartment and started walking north, with our destination as yet unnamed by him. From time to time I stole side glances at him. I had never been able to figure out what were his real beliefs in things supernatural. He seemed always to be sure he would be disappointed in his search for psychic proofs; yet he seemed, oddly enough, always to be hoping he would find them *this* time.

"You remember the theory I put forth that evening we worked with the bit of parchment?" he asked at length.

I had forgotten it, so he proceeded to remind me.

"It was my idea that certain definite sounds, in precise series, might set up vibrations—key vibrations, so to speak—which would act upon substances ordinarily invisible and intangible to us in such a way as to make them both tangible and visible—cause them to leave their own dimension, whatever it may be, and invade ours."

"Just what is 'them'?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Who knows? Dark monsters, ghosts, the beings we know as angels—anything might respond. But all answering, mind you, only to a certain sequence of definitely uttered syllables—like the electric device that opens a door in response to the ordered vibrations of a certain password to which it has been tuned."

"But we tried once to invoke the spirits by definitely uttering the syllables of that old Latin phrase in the parchment, and got nowhere."

"There's a possible reason for our failure. We didn't know how to pronounce the Latin correctly. No man alive knows how. At least, I thought that till yesterday. . . ." His voice trailed off into silence.

"Oh. And now you've found some one who can speak Latin as it was spoken two thousand years ago?"

"I've found a man who claims to be able to. He's a janitor's assistant at the Larchmont Hotel," he added.

I had no answer for this. It looked as though our present evening was to be as fruitless as any that had gone before. But having started, I decided to see the thing through.

"I met the man—an Italian from north of Milan—in an old book store yesterday afternoon. We got to talking, and, as it was his afternoon off, I asked him up to my place. I showed him the old parchment sheet with the Black Magic incantation on it, and he was intensely interested. It was then that he claimed to be able to speak Latin with its original, natural inflection."

"How did he explain that ability?" I asked skeptically.

"He didn't explain it. He simply asserted it. Then he asked if he could take the parchment back to his basement room with him. He confessed to being interested in spirit-lore, said that this looked like a genuine treasure, and wanted to examine it more closely. I let him borrow it. This afternoon he called up and urgently begged me to come and get it again—he couldn't get away from his duties long enough to deliver it in person. I thought there was a good deal of nervousness in his voice, as though he was afraid of something."

"Well?" I said, after we had walked half a block in silence.

"Well—don't you see? Here we have a supposedly authentic magic phrase that will make fabulous things materialize from the other-world, or the fifth or sixth dimension, whatever you choose to call it. Also, here we have a man who says he can pronounce the phrase correctly—phonetically, just as some old necromancer wrote it down—setting up the ancient sound-vibration-series that we, in our fumbling mispronunciation of a dead language, were unable to attain. All we have to do now is tie the two together: get the man to speak the phrase in the precise way that will register on that device which will open the psychic door between worlds. It might be interesting."

At this point we reached the Larchmont Hotel, a huge but modestly middle class resident-hotel building on the fringe of Chicago's Gold Coast.

Bryce walked down a flight of concrete stairs and rang a bell. The door before us was promptly opened, and we entered to confront a man who was evidently the one Bryce had mentioned.

I CONFESS to a slight shock at his appearance. To begin, he didn't look like the type of fellow one would expect to see in a job that called for physical strength. He was slight of body, with hands that were tapering and artistic under their coat of grime. His hair was snow-white, though he couldn't have been more than forty-five; and his brow and eyes were those of an intelligent man with a studious turn of mind. His eyes, incidentally, were not the liquid brown usually attributed to Italy's sons, but were blue-gray as are the eyes of so many Italians born at the foot of the Alps. And in those blue-gray eyes—more responsible for the little shock I'd felt at sight of him than was his physical appearance—were haunting melancholies, like the shadows of far-off fears.

Bryce named him as Mr. Abracelli when he introduced us. The man bowed acknowledgment of the introduction. "Will you come to my rooms for a moment?" he invited us, with a polished manner and an English accent that told of an excellent education.

We followed him down a corridor lined with slatted store-rooms, and came to the apartment furnished him by the hotel.

I got a second slight shock when we stepped inside.

The apartment consisted of a large living-room, a small sleeping-alcove, and a plainly unused kitchenette. This living-room was furnished like a charlatan sorcerer's studio. There was a small crystal ball in a corner, uncovered as though Abracelli had been peering into it when we rang his bell. There was a pile of aromatic herbs on a scarred end-table. A skull hung by a wire beside the door of the kitchenette. The walls were draped with black cotton cloth so arranged that the small windows could be covered if it was desired to shut out all light. A pestle and mortar, of the sort used by pharmacists, was on another end-table, with a residue in the mortar of some grayish powder.

"I amuse myself sometimes by mild experiments," said Abracelli, with a deprecating wave around at his unusual possessions. That was all the explanation he offered.

He opened a cheap, battered trunk, and got out a thick, discolored parchment sheet, which I recognized as the one Bryce and I had vainly pored over on the evening I have mentioned. He handled the thing in a most peculiar way, as though it were so hot that it scorched his fingers, and yet clutching it tightly as if he were afraid it would explode if he dropped it.

"What do you think of it?" asked Bryce, with a deference that showed me he conceived himself to be speaking to an expert in parchment antiquities. "Is it genuine?"

Abracelli nodded his snow-white head. "It is undoubtedly genuine," he said. "And if it were mine, I would throw it into the furnace."

"Then you think the incantation would work?"

I peered closely at Abracelli, curious to see how much of superstition (as I myself have always labelled all these things) could find a place in his obviously keen intellect. I saw a quick nervous spasm contort his face.

"I am sure it would work," he said quietly.

"Have you tried it?" demanded Bryce.

"*Dio!* No! There are things in life it is best to let alone!"

"Would you repeat the incantation for us?"

"Not for anything on earth, *Signor,*" said Abracelli, in a tone of finality.

Bryce looked disappointed. "I had hoped you would place your remarkable knowledge of Latin at our disposal," he said. "I'll pay you well."

"No payment could be high enough."

"But what, exactly, do you fear?" demanded Bryce. "What sort of creature, or shade, do you expect to answer the invocation?"

Abracelli shook his head. "I don't know. Something—sufficiently terrible. I will not pronounce it."

"Then," said Bryce, "we will pronounce it ourselves. You must teach us the correct pronunciation."

This too, Abracelli refused; and there followed a verbal conflict that left me more and more perplexed. Bryce pleaded with Abracelli, browbeat him, almost threatened him. Abracelli stubbornly refused either to repeat the incantation himself or to teach Bryce to enunciate it in living Latin. And I, as onlooker, didn't know whether to laugh or to become annoyed and leave. The superior behavior of this curious janitor's assistant had strongly predisposed me toward him; and his almost peasantish fear —for fear pure and simple had begun to show on his face—of an absurd Latin

phrase on a tattered parchment sheet now disappointed and disgusted me.

I was at the point of suggesting to Bryce that we end the farce and leave, when Abracelli surrendered.

"Very well," he said with a sigh, "I shall teach you how to say it as the man who penned it would have said it. The result be on your head. I will not stay in the room while you pronounce the invocation."

I thought I detected an inconsistency here, and promptly jumped on it.

"How can you teach us the pronunciation," I asked, "without yourself repeating the incantation and calling up—whatever it is that may respond?"

"I shall teach you word by word," said Abracelli, with a quiet dignity that made me feel, for an instant, like a boor. "The invocation, if it is like others I have known, is only effective when intoned as a whole, in a regular, syllable-by-syllable manner."

"That sounds like my vibration theory," said Bryce quickly to me. "Our other-world neighbors are not summoned by the wording of the incantation, but by the peculiar combination of sound waves caused by a particular combination of vowels and consonants."

"I have never heard it explained that way," remarked Abracelli, with thoughtful frown, "but it may be as you say. Come—I will teach you how the living Romans spoke their language."

I HAVE tried since to remember exactly the shadings of inflection given the Latin tongue by this man who, rightly or fraudulently, claimed to know the language of living Rome. But I can't. I can only offer an approximate description. There is a vague memory that the speech as a whole was almost as guttural as Arabic; that the U's were pronounced after the French manner of saying *Monsieur;* that the B's were enunciated as if there were an almost audible G before each; and that the V's seemed to have a hint of W after them, thus: *vwee.*

First, to give us an idea of how it went, Abracelli read all that was decipherable of the fragmentary foreword: ". . . whoso shall utter the formula in a loud clear tone, sound by sound with equal emphasis on each, shall call from the hidden world about us dread denizens. . . ." I must say that, while his Latin sounded like no Latin ever heard in a modern classroom, it did sound oddly authoritative.

From here he passed to the invocation itself. But there he balked for a moment.

"I implore you," he began, with profound distress showing in his blue-gray eyes.

"You have promised," was Bryce's inflexible answer. So, syllable by syllable, with palpable care to say no two of the mystic words in proper sequence, Abracelli gave us a model enunciation of the phrase that was supposed to be a sort of vibratory bridge between our world and others. And Bryce repeated each word after him, till he had his palate reasonably adjusted to the unfamiliar sounds.

"You can now say it correctly enough," said Abracelli. "But—are you really going to risk it?"

"I am," replied Bryce. "For several years I've earnestly sought after proof that there is some foundation of fact for the old fables about spirits and ghosts and demons. To date, I've got nowhere. But I would still do anything, no matter how ridiculous it seemed on the face of it, if I thought it offered a remote chance of affording me that proof."

"This is not a remote chance," said Abracelli. "It is a certainty! If you will excuse me, I will go to the boiler room while you conduct your mad experiment."

And go he did, closing the door firmly behind him. I turned to Bryce and laughed. The more I thought about how genuinely frightened at the invocation the Italian had seemed to be, the harder I laughed.

Bryce didn't join me; and at length I sobered enough to notice in his dark eyes a curiously dubious look.

"Good heavens, Bryce!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me you think anything supernatural or weird will actually answer to the calling of that Latin formula?"

"The vibration theory sounds rather plausible," he said, lighting a cigarette. And that was all I could get out of him.

BRYCE stepped to the door and locked it. Then we looked around the room to see if, for some unknown reason, Abracelli had secreted devices to fool us. The man was admittedly a dabbler in occult things; and no other class of humans will go to such elaborate lengths to try to trick others into their own fantastic beliefs. We found nothing suspicious-looking, however, so we prepared to perform our simple experiment.

We took the thick old parchment sheet and laid it on the round table that occupied the center of the room. Over this was a shaded light, which poured a circle of illumination on the table top and left the rest of the room in comparative dimness. Bryce drew up a chair, and I drew up another. But before he started to read the ancient invocation, he hesitated.

"You're quite sure you want to go through with this?" he asked me solemnly.

"Of course," I replied impatiently. Then: "If you really believe that some supernatural thing will appear in answer to that silly invocation—you're alone in your belief!"

Bryce shrugged. "I suppose you're right in your skepticism," he said slowly. "I suppose tonight as usual we shall discover nothing more exciting than hypnotic effects or hidden wires."

We gazed at each other an instant over the ancient sheet of parchment—seated in that curiously furnished room that was actually in the bowels of a great modern building, but which figuratively might well have been the tapestry-draped cavern of some old-time wizard. Then Bryce began to read the ancient invocation.

I felt a curious prickling of the skin as his voice rolled out the gutturally sonorous syllables in the manner Abracelli had taught him. The queer power of certain sounds over us! The Latin Mass—for example. How that stirs and thrills one, though one may be utterly ignorant of the meaning of the separate words! It is the stateliness of the thing, not its meaning, that causes every nerve to thrill in response.

Just so did the reading of this old incantation, with the pronunciation Abracelli claimed was that of the mystic Roman who wrote it, make the nerve-ends seem to flutter and twitch in sympathy. There was just one difference. While this had all the rolling stateliness of the Mass, there were buried in it subtle shades of obscenity and terror. It sounded not unlike it had been designed to be read in some gloomy huge cathedral erected not to God, but blasphemously to the Devil. I daresay, though, that this was all imagination on my part.

". . . come from the reaches of the outer dark and the shades of the other life to my presence . . ."

Syllable by syllable, beat by beat, like a beginning pianist playing an exercise to the tick of a metronome, Bryce read up to here. At this point he stopped, and stared intently toward a chair in a corner only dimly lit by the shaded lamp.

I followed his gaze—and a startled exclamation came from my lips.

The chair at which we were staring with wide, incredulous eyes was a prosaic easy-chair with a faded tapestry covering, that was drawn up slantwise to the corner of the room leaving a V-shaped space behind it. It wasn't at the chair we were gazing, though, but at something that dangled down its back.

The something was a huge, black paw, not unlike the paw of a bear except that it had almost human seeming, thick fingers tipped with curving talons. It was the paw of a beast, with the definite fingers-and-thumb configuration of something near-human. The whole—paw and claw-like fingers and thick wrist (which disappeared over the back of the chair away from us)—was covered with matted, coarse black hair.

"Do you see it, too?" Bryce whispered.

I nodded, while my scalp felt as though each separate hair was rising like the hackles of a frightened dog.

The claw-like, bestial hand contracted slightly. I'll swear I heard its talons scratch against the fabric of the tapestry covering. Then it was withdrawn slowly from sight over the back of the chair.

Together, with muscles tensed for action, we leaped for that chair and whisked it away from the wall.

There was nothing behind it.

We looked at each other, and at the same second each of us had the same thought.

"Abracelli *was* acting when he pretended to be so frightened," I said. "Hypnotism! But he's pretty good to induce such a clear picture in both our minds from a distance."

Bryce nodded; but he frowned a little, as though not quite convinced.

"Hypnotism, probably," he said. "Well—let's get on with it, and see what new tricks our friend can furnish to mystify us with."

We went back to the table and sat down. Bryce cleared his throat. "This time," he declared, "I'll finish it!" And he began again to read the invocation.

". . . come from the reaches of the outer dark . . ."

The measured syllables struck at the brain like the rhythmic beat of a tom-tom. Again I felt that odd prickling sensation all over my body.

". . . and the shades of the other life . . ."

As further testimony to the power of what I was still sure was Abracelli's hypnotic ability, I thought I detected a faint odor in the room now that hadn't been there a moment ago: a musty, animalish smell, like that which pervades a zoo. But it was a mere ghost of an odor, nothing definite enough to describe accurately.

". . . to my presence here in the world of men I command you."

There. The reading was done. The supposedly dread invocation had been hurled as a challenge.

Bryce looked up from the parchment. His eyes followed mine to the chair-back where we had seen (or had been hypnotized into imagining we had seen) the hairy black paw.

It wasn't there now. It had not reappeared, either in our mind's eye or in actuality. We stared around the room.

Nothing. We listened intently. Nothing.

I drew a deep breath. In spite of the assurance of common sense and logic that nothing could be in that room, that the mumbling of a few syllables in a dead language could not possibly cause other presences to materialize, I was unutterably relieved to find that we really *were* alone, just as we had been before the uttering of the invocation.

For a few seconds longer we sat in silence. Then Bryce sighed, and lit a cigarette.

"Once more we draw blank," he murmured, sending a blue cloud of smoke to curl in the beam of light cast by the lamp, and lose itself in the dimness beyond. "I suppose we might as well go home—good God!"

On the table between us had suddenly appeared the paw. It was resting on the table top, palm down, as solid-seeming as the wood itself.

In every detail we could see it: the coarse black hair, of a slightly reddish cast near the roots—the thick nails, or talons curving from the blunt finger-ends—the folds of grayish, money-like skin at the hairy knuckles.

At the same instant I felt a hot, fetid breath on the back of my neck, felt my chair creak forward as though a heavy weight had pressed against its back, felt hairy fingers fleetingly touch my shoulder.

For the first time I felt fear. Numbing, sickening fear! This could not—*could* not be hypnotically induced illusion! I shouted aloud, and leaped from my chair, to stand trembling, staring at the space behind it.

I saw nothing. Nothing! I looked at the table. The paw had disappeared again.

"Steady," said Bryce. His own lips were white. "Steady." He stopped abruptly, and his eyes, following mine, saw what I was seeing.

Just outside the range of clearest light, across the table from us, coiled the thickest wisps of smoke from Bryce's cigarette. In the still air of the room these had not been much dissipated. But now they were suddenly being agitated, as though something were moving through them. At the same time, some of the thicker, further coils were blotted from sight, to reappear again, as if a body moved before them. But our eyes could still see—nothing.

The agitation of the smoke wisps persisted, in a sort of airy trail behind something that moved around the table and toward us. Involuntarily Bryce threw up his hands in a gesture of defense.

The burning ash of his cigarette was abruptly scattered in a shower of sparks as though something had struck violently against it. There was an odor of scorched hair, and the air was rent by an ear-splitting howl.

The black hairy paw again materialized before us. But this time it was not still. It was clenching and unclenching, clutching savagely toward us. And now, slowly, as though a cloud of mist were whirling together more and more tightly to pack into a definite shape, we saw—the body the paw was attached to.

Just a glimpse our horrified eyes had of a gigantic, hairy black shape, something like a man, something like a gorilla. Just a glimpse we had of flaming eyes that were those of neither man nor beast. Just a glimpse of a nightmare figure about to leap.

Then, as we cowered back, the thing howled once more with fury, the electric lamp was dashed from the table with unimaginable violence—and we were in darkness with the creature.

I felt talons rake across my cheek. A

great hand closed around my throat, and I was hurled clear across the room. I heard Bryce cry out in mortal terror, heard a bedlam of bestial snarling and howling, and felt a weight on my chest that I was sure must crush it in. Then I lost consciousness.

I CAME to my senses, how much later I do not know, to find that my shoulders were being roughly shaken. Instinctively I raised my hands to protect myself, but when I opened my eyes I saw—not the hairy terror, but Bryce, white and trembling, bending over me.

"I thought you were dead," were his first words. "My God, what a narrow escape!"

"Where is the—the thing?" I asked weakly, gazing around the room. The place was in fearful disorder, with chairs knocked about and the table tipped over and the black cloth ripped from the walls in a dozen spots. But there was no sign anywhere of the awful hairy paw, or of its even more awful owner.

"It has disappeared back to whatever place it came from," said Bryce.

I sat up and dabbed at the deep scratches on my cheek. And as consciousness returned more completely to me, reason followed close behind—and at the things reason intimated, I began to wonder, and then to feel very, very sheepish.

I looked speculatively at Bryce.

"Done in!" I said. "Tricked to a turn! The prize fools of the universe!"

Bryce stared. "What do you mean by that?" he asked at length.

"I mean that we must bow to Signor Abracelli. He has handled us like children. We must certainly congratulate him when he returns from his boiler room retreat."

Bryce's heavy eyebrows went up. "You think there can be a doubt as to what we saw?"

"Unfortunately, there's no doubt whatever. It must have all been transmitted bodily from Abracelli's mind to ours."

"And what we felt?" demanded Bryce.

"Was—simply each other! In our excitement one of us knocked the lamp over, and in the darkness we fought each other like a couple of frightened cats."

"The thing that struck the sparks from my cigarette?"

"You knocked your cigarette against the edge of the table as you raised your hands. Yes—a fine pair of fools we proved ourselves to be!"

Bryce smiled grimly. "All these things you claim are quite possible, even plausible. But don't patronize our foolishness too *much*, old boy. For I have proof, which will satisfy even you, that the thing we saw was no hypnotic illusion. It was real enough—here in this room, called into being by the Latin incantation."

He raised his right hand. I observed for the first time that he had been keeping it tightly clenched.

"I don't know just when, in the struggle, I accumulated these souvenirs, but I regained consciousness to find them safely clutched in my hands. They tell the whole story, I think. You're still skeptical? You're still unable to believe what you saw with your own eyes and felt with your own flesh? Then—look!"

He unclenched his fingers, and as I looked at what he held, I felt an abrupt return of some of the cold horror that had gripped me before.

In the palm of his hand were several coarse, crinkly black hairs, slightly reddish at the roots—to which still adhered flakes of grayish, monkey-like skin.

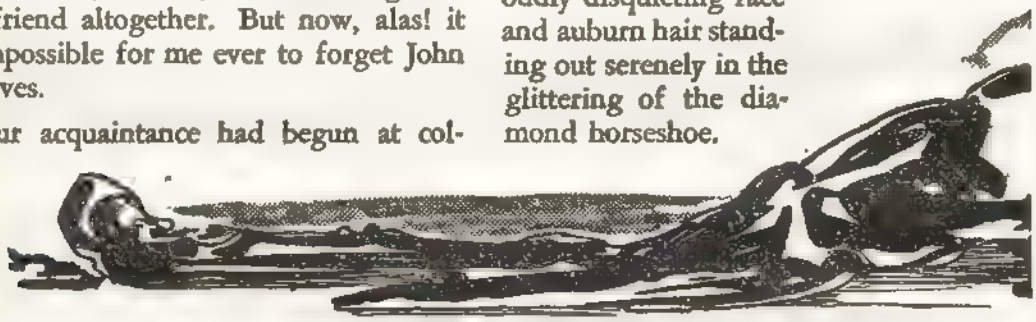
IN THE LEFT

by AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

A tale of dark powers unloosed by one who could not bear to see his sweetheart consigned to the grave

IF I HAD not counted John Thraves my best friend, I should in all likelihood never have gone up the Massachusetts coast on that unpleasant and foreboding journey climaxed by that unforgettable visit to the lonely house beyond Gloucester. A strange silence, broken now and then by vague, incoherent letters, had been the determining factor in my visit, and as I sit here now, writing this, I can not help but feel how much more at ease I would be, had I chosen to disregard this silence; how much better, indeed, if I had forgotten my friend altogether. But now, alas! it is impossible for me ever to forget John Thraves.

Our acquaintance had begun at college, a common interest in architecture serving to draw us closer and closer together as the years of our college training went by. The acquaintance ripened into a friendship that continued for some time after we were graduated. Indeed, it was interrupted only by Thraves' deep love for Dorothea Keane, a love so profound, so absorbing, that it enslaved Thraves, a man whose iron will at college had been a continual source of admiration to me. And I could fully understand his love for this strangely fascinating woman, she who might have been such a woman as Rossetti would have painted—tall and slender, her features of that fine classic mold so idealized at the end of the last century, with the pallid olive quality in complexion and the same smoldering auburn hair that belonged to the harmony that was hers. I have an unforgettable picture of her, alone in a box at the opera, wrapped in a green velvet cloak, her oddly disquieting face and auburn hair standing out serenely in the glittering of the diamond horseshoe.



It was this woman who drew to her John Thraves, body and soul. In August of the same year he met her, they were engaged, and in September I saw the last of Thraves and Dorothea Keane, when my firm sent me to Vienna to study. I was still in Europe when terrible tragedy struck at my friend, sending him from New York City to virtual isolation at the old Thraves estate on the Massachusetts

WING

"I saw John Thraves prostrate before an accursed living thing from the furthermost reaches of most evil cosmos."

coast. They were to have been married at Christmas. A week before, Dorothea contracted a severe cold, which speedily developed into pneumonia, resulting in her death two days before the date set for the wedding.

Her death shattered John Thraves' life, and his vainly hopeful letters did not deceive me. The tragedy was consummated in a ghastly fashion when the Keane family vault was opened one night and the body of the lovely Dorothea removed in its casket. Though this terrible thing happened only two days after her burial, it was over a month later before I had learned of it, and only then did I know the reason for the inexplicable silence on the part of my friend. How great this added shock must have been to him was indicated to me by the fact that not once

in subsequent letters did he so much as hint of it.

From the time that John Thraves had retired to the lonely estate on the hook beyond Gloucester, the letters I had from him were filled with a deep melancholy, and were often extremely brief, tense, paradoxical notes. All during the following spring and summer, his letters, strange long epistles, became more and more incoherent and rambling. More often than not, he would start his letters with terse sentences about the unruly weather that swept the Massachusetts coast; then, suddenly, in the middle of a paragraph, he would write incomprehensible nonsense about life after death, or some kindred subject. One paragraph, which he started, as customary, with a sentence about the weather, contained no less than thirty different subjects, ranging all the way from black magic to certain mystic rites performed in the African Impi country.

His references to black magic, more constant than any other reference, puzzled and disturbed me most. The impressions his letters gave varied fully as much as his subject matter. At one time I had the impression that he was himself practising black magic, at another time that he was writing a book on the subject; and at still another time he wrote in such shuddering terms of black magic that I thought for an instant that his mind had been unsettled.

In September of the following year I returned to New York, fully expecting that before many weeks were up, I should get an invitation to join my old friend on the Thraves estate. But none came. The same incoherent letters continued to reach me, breaking into long periods of silence, until at last I decided that I would seek him out, whether he so desired or not. My first impulse to announce my arrival I discarded at the last moment, a vague belief that he might try to prevent or discourage my coming occurring to trouble me.

I LEFT New York one morning in November, and came into Boston at about six that night. It was raining, and the mists were crowding into the city from the sea. I was glad to leave mist-haunted Boston behind me, even though the two-hour ride to Gloucester promised me little change in scene. On the way, the downpour increased, the heavy rain so drenching the panes of my coach that I could not see an inch out into the autumn evening. I reflected upon how inauspicious a moment I had chosen to visit my old friend, but in the same thought saw that I should certainly not be turned away into a night like this, should my visit prove as unwelcome as my ever increasing forebodings suggested to me.

The station at Gloucester was deserted when my train drew in. I stepped down to the platform and looked about me. The night was dark now, and not far away the sea was dashing itself against the rocks of the coast. The rain still came down heavily, and I pulled my raincoat closer around me. A single light on the platform showed only a dim haze through the rain. Some one finally came along the platform toward me, and I recognized him for a cab-driver whom Thraves and I had used in our college days. His appearance served only to bring back memories which time had thrust far into the past.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

He did not recognize me. I put down my bag. "To the Thraves place," I said.

"You don't want to be goin' over there tonight, sir?"

"Yes. Of course. Why not?"

"Well," he drawled, "it's a bit far on an unholy night like this."

"Nonsense," I snapped. "It's just around the end of the hook, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Not more than two miles, is it?"

"No, sir, but——"

"Well, then?" I said sharply.

"'Tis a bad night, sir," he started again, but I cut him short.

"Take me there," I said.

He grumbled something, but picked up my bag. We started for his car, which became visible now at the end of the platform. I stepped into the back and pulled the door shut behind me. The driver tossed my bags into the front, and climbed in after them. He started up the engine, but before he left the platform, he turned around to me and called as if in afterthought, "I can't be takin' you further than the gate, sir. The road don't go no further."

"Very well."

I remembered the Thraves estate, and the rides there from Gloucester. When we were yet at college, John Thraves and I had come up occasionally for a week-end. Gloucester on a sunny day is a charming city, with the blue sky above and the blue sea below, disturbed only by the slightest roll on its surface, rippling the reflections of the clouds. In the harbor in the morning can be seen the thousand masts of the fishing fleet moving out through the dawn mists, and at sunset, moving back in, crowding the bay. And in the air always is the strong salty odor of the sea.

But tonight it was not like that. There was nothing to be seen through the rain and blackness, save only an occasional glimmer moving in the distance, the light of a vessel in the harbor, perhaps. We were out of Gloucester before I had seen more than the dim, half-disclosed outlines of a dozen scattered buildings. By the way the wind blew the rain against the car, I knew that we were moving along the hook, with the ocean on two sides of us. There was nothing out there but black space and an occasional faint light, and, once or twice, the raucous voice of a foghorn far out on the bay.

We came to a stop abruptly, and the driver turned around with, "Here you be, sir. Seventy-five cents, please, sir."

I PAID him, and found myself deposited with my bag on the sandy road before the gate that marked the edge of the Thraves estate. It was a good ten minutes' walk from the gate to the house, I knew, and a not too pleasant walk through what was almost a wood of pines as black as the night itself. I started out, unhesitatingly, through the grilled gate and up the stone path under the trees. The rain still came down, and the wind swept in from the sea, bending and swaying the creaking trees. The steady pounding of the surf, sounding rhythmically against the rocky point of the hook, came to my ears as from a great distance. I looked ahead of me and thought I saw a light where the dark mass of the house loomed; but it was faint and dim, and it seemed to waver, so that I could not be sure if it were a real light or an illusion. But as I came closer, I saw that it was indeed a light, a light from the lower windows of the left wing, but even close I saw it dim and faint, as if it were the light of candles burning in the room behind drawn curtains, not a definite light at all, but more a blur where the windows were, drawn curtains veiling the house from the bleak night.

I was now at the very edge of the pine grove that surrounded the house, and I stood in the shelter of the great, gaunt trunk of the one tree that reared itself near the door, looking at this rambling old New England country home, with its

low roofs and many gables, feeling an incomprehensible sense of fear, of danger almost, a sensation which seemed to suggest abrupt, unexplained flight to me. The wind and the rain, the sighing and creaking of the pines, the distant melancholy pounding of the sea, the old wooden house with its single gray light—these details gave me a feeling of stark and impenetrable gloom, a feeling so strong that for a moment I hesitated to pierce the solitude of my old friend Thraves. But my hesitation lasted only a moment, and it was gone; it was not as easy to shake off the somber gloominess which enshrouded me.

Unhesitating, I approached the door, put my hand on the great iron knocker, lifted it, and let it drop. There came to my ears the sharp sound made by iron striking iron, and immediately after, muffled reverberations within the house sounded extraordinarily loud in a sudden lull in the wind. Then the sound died, and there was again only the rain, the wind, and the constant sea.

Once more I lifted the knocker and let it fall, and again I heard the sound of iron and the magnified sounds from within the house. Still there was no sign that my knock had been heard.

I turned and looked back into the pine grove, at the dim line I knew to be the path by which I had come. Should I start the long walk back to Gloucester and await the coming day to find my friend? But that was a good half-hour's walk in the rain, and already I was chilled to the bone, wet and shivering. The pine trees sobbed in the wind, and in a sudden gust, the rain came beating down into my upturned face.

I turned to the shadowed door once more, determined to try the knocker yet again. I had just lifted my hand, when the door was pulled silently back, and a man stood there, holding aloft a guttering candle.

"Who is it?" asked a gruff voice, which I recognized at once as that of Fenton, the caretaker. At least, I thought, Thraves is not alone in this dismal house.

"It's Mr. Suthard, Park Suthard," I replied. "Do you remember me, Fenton?"

A sound like a startled gasp came from Fenton. He raised the candle above his head, and stepped aside. "Come in, come in, Mr. Suthard," he said, almost eagerly.

I put down my bag in the hall and turned to him. "Is your master here?" I asked.

He nodded his white head slowly. "Yes, he's here." Then he held the candle close to my face and peered at me over his spectacles; a smile broke into his wrinkled face, a face which my instinct told me had not smiled for many months. "Well, well, Mr. Suthard it is," he said, still smiling crookedly. "I'm glad."

He led the way slowly down the hall, mumbling more to himself than to me: ". . . glad you've come. When you came up with the young master you were always one to be laughing and joking and carrying on as young folk should. Perhaps now, Mr. Thraves . . . perhaps you can make him laugh again."

I said, "Nothing wrong, is there, Fenton?"

He stopped and looked at me speculatively. Then he shook his head. "Would I say *wrong,* I wonder?" he murmured. "He's not been the same, sir," he went on, "a bit queer, sir. It was after that young lady——"

I nodded, cutting him off with a word. "Could I see him tonight?" I asked.

Fenton hesitated. "He's in the left wing, sir, and I'm not allowed in there. I'll try to call him, though he does not like to be disturbed. But then, he does

spend most of his time in there, and I can do no more than try, sir."

FENTON shook his head, mumbling to himself. He led the way through open doors into what had been the drawing-room. The candle light betrayed the strange state of neglect into which the once grand old room had fallen. As I crossed the threshold, the broken end of a gossamer thread caught my face. The absence of electricity struck me suddenly; I had expected Fenton to switch on the lights as we entered the room, but he had not done so.

"Don't you have any lights?" I asked.

Fenton shook his head. "No, sir. They were blown out in a storm about a month ago, and Mr. Thraves won't have them repaired."

"Won't have them repaired?" I exclaimed.

"I keep telling him," Fenton said. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "But he won't have anything done. Won't have any one here, prying about, he says. It's not any longer for me to say, sir."

Fenton busied himself now with my bag, took my hat and coat, and then lit some wood that lay in the open fireplace. In a few moments the slowly creeping flames had grown into a blaze. But the added light from the flames made the old drawing-room only more gloomy, for it showed still more clearly the heavy dust that lay thickly on all the furniture, the walls, the rugs, and the unbroken spider webs that were spun across the windows and in the darkened corners of the room.

Fenton pulled a chair up to the fireplace, brushed it off with his handkerchief, and offered it to me. I sat down, rubbing my hands together, trying to stop my chattering teeth.

"I'll try to get Mr. Thraves for you now, sir," he said.

I nodded. He walked out into the hall, and then I heard a door close behind him. Shortly after, I heard his voice calling John Thraves; it was as he had said—he was not allowed in the left wing, and was forced to call his master from the old-fashioned double doors leading into the wing.

I leaned toward the already dying flames. For almost a half-hour I sat there, the silence of the house growing on me more steadily each moment. Fenton's voice had long ceased calling, but he had not returned, and I did not know whether he had been able to gain John Thraves' attention until I heard a door open suddenly, and the sound of slippered feet coming slowly along the hall. I turned expectantly toward the door of the room.

IT IS impossible to describe adequately the appearance of my friend as he stood in that doorway, his face lit by the last dancing light of the dying fire, impossible to convey fully the shock I felt at sight of him. I had left him not much over a year ago as I had always known him, erect, dark-haired, his face healthily tanned, his eyes bright, his lips firm. The figure I now beheld was everything that the John Thraves I had known was not. He was clad in a long black robe that swept the floor; it was open at the throat and its scarlet lining served only to heighten the grayness of his face, his pallid, ghostly cheeks, his gleaming, feverish eyes, his colorless lips, drooping loosely and revoltingly. His hair was long and unkempt, and there was a stubble on his chin sufficiently thick to be called a beard; a mustache, too, had grown. His thin shoulders and his back were bent forward, giving him the posture of an old man, burdened with years. I felt his burning eyes sweep me from head to foot. The smile with which I had awaited him

died on my lips; I could not speak. He came toward me, slowly, walking like an old man, shuffling along, dragging his slippered feet after him.

Then he spoke. His low-pitched voice was the tense voice of a man ill of some incurable disease. "You have come," he said.

I smiled, trying to shake off the strange premonitory feeling that had come over me. "How are you, John?" I asked, rising. He was looking at me vaguely, unseeingly, dispassionately. "I finally decided I had to come to know how you were."

He smiled a little, then raised a thin hand and brushed back the long hair from his forehead. "I am glad," he said simply, "only I don't know where to put you. We've got nothing in order here. My studies——" His voice trailed off into nothingness, and he looked abstractedly around him, his hand straying to his neck, where the open robe revealed his dead-white skin. Then he turned abruptly, calling, "Fenton! Fenton!"

Fenton appeared out of the hall. It was as if he had been waiting. "Yes, sir," he said. "You called, sir."

"Is there a room in order for Mr. Suthard?"

Fenton hesitated. Then he said, "Any of the upper rooms in the left wing can be made ready in a few minutes, sir."

Thraves passed his thin hands through his hair; his eyes were undecided. "Only in the left wing?" he asked irritably.

Fenton nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Very well. Take the bag up, build a fire, and lay out the linen. But mind you go up the front way. And leave us a light here."

"Yes, sir," murmured Fenton. He lit a taper and stood it on the mantel. Then he bent to take my bag and shot a guarded look at me; his expression said, "You see how he has changed? Then he went out of the room, and I heard him going slowly up the stairs at the end of the hall.

Thraves turned to me. "A year now," he said abruptly.

I nodded. "Over," I said. Looking at him, I began to wish I hadn't come.

He peered at me intently for a moment; then his eyes shifted and he looked at the last glowing embers in the fireplace. "I have been ill," he said, making a vague gesture with his hands. Then he sat down, and we spoke briefly of my European year. At odd moments, there were gleams of our old intimacy, yet never was our conversation free from the feeling of a wall between us. Often, Thraves' face betrayed a preoccupation which was not natural to him. Then, suddenly, he interrupted himself in the middle of a sentence, just as he had done so often in his letters, and said, "Did I write to you of black magic? Did I write you of my work?"

I said, "You did say something about black magic, but I have forgotten what it was."

He nodded quickly. "An interesting study, black magic." He would have gone on, but something interrupted him. He sat bolt upright, all his faculties straining to listen, a sharp exclamation checked on his lips. "Is there something?" he asked. "Do you hear anything? Did you hear——"

I had heard a shuffling noise during a lull in the storm, but had assumed it to be Fenton. "No," I said, "I heard nothing."

He was reassured at once. Then he went on where he had broken off. "Long ago I was interested in black magic. There were old books. I came upon an interesting theory about life after death, and it is believed by some to be still in practical use."

I thought: He is rambling. I said, "I remember. You wrote me of it."

He looked slightly puzzled. "Did I? I can't remember." He looked at me a little askance. "But you don't believe in black magic, do you, Suthard?"

I shook my head. "No, I don't."

He clasped his hands and looked at me. "You know," he went on, "there is a theory about the animation of dead bodies—embalmed bodies, that is. But Lord God, *there is no soul!*" His eyes, as he said this, were so tragic that I felt for a moment that John Thraves had gone utterly mad.

I got to my feet, feigning a yawn. I'd like to get to bed, if you don't mind, old man," I said.

The words had hardly left my lips when Fenton entered the room; again I had the uncomfortable impression that he had been waiting in the hall.

THRAVES led the way up the stairs to my room. We went into the chamber, he still leading with the candle, which he placed on the bureau. Others were burning in brackets on the walls, so that the room was quite light.

I threw open the casement window, despite the wind and rain, for there was a musty odor of age in the room that stifled and revolted me. Thraves did not seem to mind, for he went over and leaned out. Then he sank listlessly into a chair, with his back to the window.

"If you hear anything in the night, Suthard, don't be alarmed," he said. "And don't prowl about, please, because that disturbs me very much. Sometimes I walk in my sleep; if I should see any one then, the shock might be too much for me. My heart is very bad."

Sympathetic words sprang quickly to my lips, but he halted them with a curt gesture. "I'm sorry," I murmured.

Thraves got up and went slowly to the door. "I didn't want to tell you," he said, "but I dare not take a risk." At the door, he turned to me. "You don't believe in black magic, do you, Suthard?" he asked, as if he had forgotten asking me before.

I shook my head.

"I didn't ask you before, did I?" he said suddenly, and before I could answer, continued, "No, no, of course not." He closed the door behind him.

My astonishment knew no bounds. Certainly something had occurred in the interval since Dorothea Keane's death to unsettle John Thraves' mind. When finally I had managed to subdue my agitation, I looked about the room. It was panelled with a dark wood, and the ceiling was low. The casement was in a gable, the floor of which was raised above the level of the floor of the room. I went to the window and looked out. The rain had abated somewhat, though the wind was still strong. There was the dark sea, and the white foam of the waves as they broke boomingly on the shore was visible from where I stood. Once more I felt the heavy atmosphere of this place bearing me down, and again the haggard appearance of John Thraves suddenly remembered depressed me further. There was something evil here, something brooding in the air about the house. And John, I felt, knew and recognized it for what it was.

I moved away from the window, and went to the door. I pulled the door open slowly, held my candle high, and peered into the long shadowy hall. It was an action with no motive, and I would have withdrawn into my room in an instant, had not a small white object on the floor of the hall slightly down and across from my door attracted my attention. With pardonable curiosity, I stepped swiftly

forward and picked it up, taking it with me into my room. What I held in my hand brought all my senses instantly alert, and at the same moment perplexed and astonished me. *It was a woman's silk stocking, and it had been worn only once, and that recently!*

I do not remember my chaotic thoughts clearly, but I do remember that one stood out above them all. Was the cause of Thraves' strangeness a woman, of whose existence I had not the slightest hint? Fenton would know, I thought, and I moved at once to summon him. But I paused with my hand on the bell rope; even while I thought that the clang of the bell might disturb Thraves, I saw that the rope had been cut a foot from the floor.

As I stood there, the stocking still held in my hand, the sound of slow-moving footsteps came to my ears. I listened carefully; they seemed to come from below, from the hall on the first floor of the left wing. But Fenton had told me that no one was allowed in the left wing —perhaps it was Thraves still moving about? Yes, as I remembered it now, Thraves' old room had been in the left wing, at the end of the hall. The footsteps came in all likelihood from him.

I retired to the great oak bed at last, and was just in the realm of semi-consciousness which precedes sleep, when a new sound smote upon my ears, disturbing the rhythmic pounding of the sea in the distance. It was the sound of even chanting, and what it suggested was so utterly remote from my surroundings, that I raised myself on my elbow to listen. It was indeed the sound of low chanting, coming faint, as if from a great distance. Yet I felt that it came from below, perhaps from the cellars below the old house. I had little time for speculation, however; for the rhythm of the chanting, the even beating of the waves outside, and the weariness which crept over me lulled me to sleep, to a sleep which was broken by vague, unnamable dreams of horror and dread, which brought me relief only at its end, when I woke in the dawn of a new day to find the gray rain still falling, the wind still blowing through the dark pines on the shore.

In the day, Thraves' tensity of expression and preoccupation were noticeably lessened, and at odd moments he was even somewhat garrulous, though garrulity fitted him ill. In the morning, we walked out to the point that stretched like a finger into the sea, and from there looked across the bay to the ship-filled harbor. The rain still blew down in sheets, whipping across the face of the sea, but that morning it was invigorating to stand under its force, and I lifted my face to its cool rush in a vain attempt to clear my mind of the vague doubts and questions that clouded it. John wished to go back to the house, and indeed, I saw that he was in no physical condition to withstand a storm of such vehemence. Reluctantly I went back to the dark neglected house.

Later that morning, I mentioned to John the walking I had heard below me during the night, but he waved it aside. "No, no, Park! Surely not! I went directly to bed."

I said, "I'm sure I heard footsteps, and some one, I think, singing."

He started, but recovered almost at once. "You must have been dreaming," he replied. "I remember that I got a book to read myself to sleep with," he added, "but there was certainly no other sound." He looked at me sharply, watching my expression. I said nothing, though I could hardly contain myself. I had wanted to ask about the woman's stock-

ing I had found, but I was glad now that I had asked first about the sounds from below. But I meant to ask Fenton, if I could find him.

I did see him twice, but only once to speak to. And then I had time only for a brief question. "Tell me, Fenton, is there a woman in this house somewhere?"

His face remained impassive, but he said, "I am never allowed in the left wing, sir."

He was gone again before I realized that he had not answered my question, that he had, indeed, deliberately hedged. I did not attempt to follow him, to pursue my inquiry further, because Thraves was making an attempt to keep me with him.

As the day wore on, it became steadily more apparent to me that I was not a welcome guest, that my presence was distinctly not desired. At dinner that night, Thraves, after some preliminary remarks about the persistence of the wet weather, turned suddenly to me and said, "I've put a book in your room with some marked passages that I want you to read, Park."

I said, "I was about to ask you for something to read tonight."

He lapsed into silence, and shortly after, I excused myself, pleading weariness. He demurred a little, but finally assented to my going; he was obviously glad that I was going to bed.

As I left the dining-room, the first distant rumblings of an approaching thunderstorm echoed across the bay. I found the book on the counterpane of my bed. I took it up, and found that it was a very old book in Latin; a glance at a few lines told me instantly that it was a book on black magic. I leafed through it, hoping to find the passages Thraves had said he had marked.

The first of these passages was nothing more than a rambling discourse on the actuality of black magic, and numerous contemporary cases of sorcery were cited to bolster up the writer's thesis. The second concerned a Florentine case of body-snatching, and was vaguely suggestive of magical rites. The fact that this was marked convinced me of an idea I had long before accepted—the loss of Dorothea Keane's body had upset my old friend's mind, rather than her actual death.

I put the book aside for a moment to get up and close the window, through which great gusts of rain were blowing; for the storm had reached the hook, and thunderous crashes now sounded and resounded. The waves, too, were booming against the coast with ever growing vehemence, and the vivid flashes of lightning reflected on the walls of my room despite the light from many candles.

It was when I returned to my book after this brief pause that I came upon the third and longest of the passages marked. I found myself at once interested, and read as eagerly as my none too thorough knowledge of Latin allowed me to; at best it was laborious reading. "The body does not die when the soul departs," the passage read, "and it is given to such as we are to preserve ourselves if we desire by magical means. Others, too, can be preserved by us, but this is dangerous, for *it is then our living energy that animates the dead*. For animation can be brought about, but the soul is gone for ever. Remember this, and be not too urgent in matters such as these. A body must not be a week old, and yet it should be——" Here came a group of words which my limited knowledge could not enable me to translate. I read on beyond: "There are in the æther other souls, evil souls, which may take possession of the animate bodies, and drain the life from

those near. The task is fraught with utmost terror and danger. . . ."

For some time, as I read, there grew upon me the feeling that some subtle change had come over the room. I looked up, and sensed it immediately. There was an odor of burning incense, an unmistakable odor, which seemed to drift toward me from under the door to the hall.

I rose silently and opened the door; the scent in the hall was considerably stronger. As I stood there in the partly opened doorway, there came intermittently to my ears, above the noise of the storm outside, the same chanting which I had heard the night before, and again the sound of shuffling footsteps in the hall below. And then—another sound—a weird gibbering noise, in a voice that was not John Thraves'! It rose in a long uncanny wail, and died again, a shrill petulant cry, like the scream of a marmoset. I stood frozen, for just as certainly as that cry did not come from John Thraves, it came from the throat of a woman!

I withdrew abruptly into my room. For a moment I stood in perplexity; then I put my candle down, and went again into the dark hall. I crept quietly toward the back stairs from the floor below, up which the heavy scent of the incense came. On the stairs, the sounds from below were louder, more clearly defined. I hesitated, remembering suddenly that Thraves had said to Fenton on the night of my arrival, "Mind you go up the front way," and recalling that I had been kept carefully away from the lower floor of the left wing.

Then I went forward again, creeping slowly along. The shadowy hall below came gradually into sight. From the door of Thraves' room there came a wavering, shifting light, like the light of many candles, and as I stood there, looking downward, I heard once more that weird gibbering scream, breaking into the sound of Thraves' voice, which was chanting clearly in Latin. I moved forward, toward the half-open door.

Though the chanting was clear now, I could not always distinguish the words uttered by John Thraves' deep voice, tense with passion and meaning. At intervals I heard low murmurings, sudden petulant cries in what was unquestionably a woman's voice. Then abruptly there came a shrill cry, and a sound as of some heavy object falling. And again the chanting, coming as if in great sobs.

I bent stealthily forward to look into the room, and in that instant two things happened—the elements singled out that accursed house, striking it with a bolt of lightning, and a sheet of flame shot into the room into which I was looking—and one instant before this happened, *I saw into that room!*

How I got out of the house, I do not know. I have a vague recollection of staggering down the long passage in the left wing, calling wildly to John Thraves, and coming to myself at last outside, with the rain beating down upon me, Fenton at my side, the house before me a great holocaust of flame. John Thraves was nowhere to be seen, and Fenton was running to and fro, calling in a quavering voice to his master.

I have tried since then to look back upon the whole affair dispassionately, but I can not do it. I have tried to forget the terrible evidence so unwittingly chronicled in the newspapers a few days after, telling of the discovery of charred bones from two bodies in the ruins of the old Thraves house, two bodies, one of which was undeniably a woman's! I am happy because of one thing—those ghastly books, those ancient volumes on black magic, were destroyed in the holocaust!

It is, I think, the terrible memory of what I saw in that room that will not let me rest, the memory that haunts me day and night. It is doubly horrible, this memory, in the light of what had gone before that sight into John Thraves' accursed room. I remember always more sharply Thraves' wild letters, his vague and incoherent allusions to black magic, and death after life, and that damnable chapter on the animation of the dead in that old book he had put into my room. The fear-haunted face of John Thraves, his gaunt, wasted body, his sad eyes, his pathetic mouth, he in that long black scarlet-lined robe—this memory of him obsesses me always, suggesting so strongly a terrible line in the book now forever lost: "There are in the æther other souls, evil souls, which may take possession of the animate bodies, and drain the life from those near."

But that is the least. If it were only that, and not that other memory! *For as I looked into that incense-clouded room, I saw John Thraves prostrate on the floor, his lips mumbling the low chanting I had heard, prostrate before a living, breathing creature, a hellish form draped in green, limned against the black walls, its auburn hair flaming in the candlelight, an accursed living thing from the furthermost reaches of most evil cosmos, a creature with the form and face of the lovely Dorothea Keane!*

This Thing I Wish

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

This thing I wish! When Death shall come for me,
I would be buried 'neath a spreading tree.
I would not have my body coffin-bound.
In simple shroud let it be lightly wound,
And cradled gently, for its last, long sleep,
Where twining roots a kindly vigil keep.

Perchance the body that was mine shall be,
In time, a part of that far-spreading tree,
Where birds, to sing, or build their nests will come,
And bees amidst the nodding flowers will hum;
Where summer zephyrs, sweetly whispering low,
At play amongst the leaves will come and go;
Where lowing cattle, wandering up the glade,
Will pause a moment in the welcome shade.

This thing alone I ask. When Life is spent,
Cradle me so, and I shall be content.

The Siren of the Snakes

By ARLTON EADIE

A multitude of creeping things came out of the dark forest in a wave of hideous gliding death—a thrill-tale of India

"LIVE for ever, O protector of the poor! *Salaam,* O favored of Allah! Art thou not my father and my mother?"

One does not need to be long in command of a Gurkha battalion, occupying a frontier fort, before discovering that, when a Himalayan hillman starts addressing you in this strain, he intends to ask you to do him a favor. Knowing that in the absence of the assistant commissioner I was expected by the powers that be to act as judge, law-giver, policeman and general adviser to all and sundry, I resigned myself to the inevitable and summoned the Gurkha *havildar* to act as interpreter. This man, Ramzan Mar by name, possessed the gift of tongues in no small degree; there was not a hill-dialect throughout the whole of Hindu-Koh of which he did not have at least a working knowledge. He possessed another gift which, in a native, is even more rare and precious—that of brevity. He ruthlessly divested the narrative of all those endless repetitions and flowers of speech so dear to the native heart, and presented me with the gist as follows:

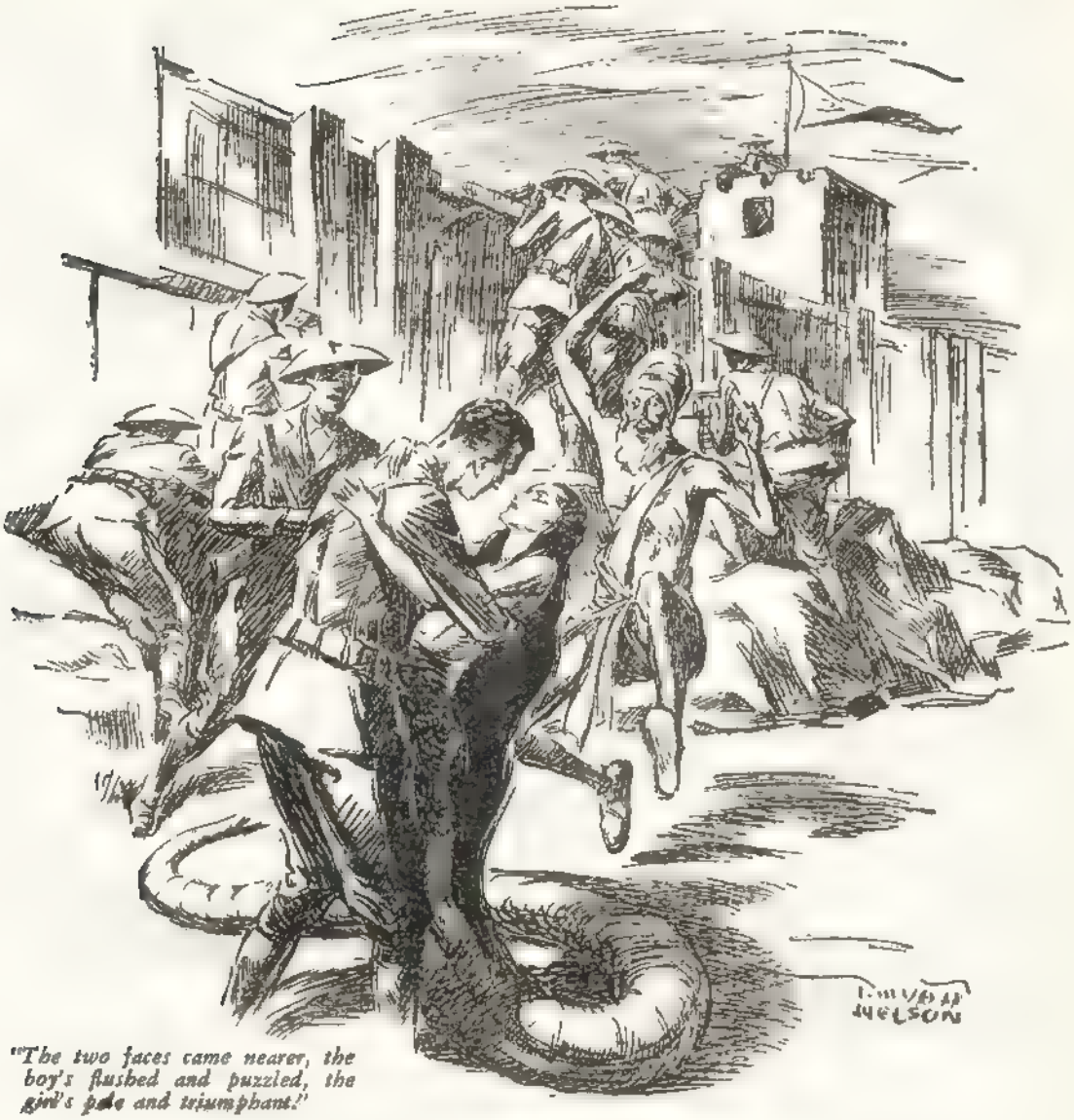
The man was a messenger from a tiny village situated among the foot-hills about six miles to the east, and had "come before the *sahib's* face" to solicit aid in putting a stop to the depredations of some denizen of the surrounding jungles.

I can assure you that I grew interested when Ramzan's translation reached this point. One of the compensations of being quartered amid the somewhat desolate mountains which form the northern bulwarks of Hindustan is that they contain hunting-grounds which may be classed among the finest in the world. Ibex, burrel, gazelles, chamois, and antelopes abound. Nor are the more formidable *ferae naturae* lacking; with patience—and luck—one might get a shot at a leopard or prowling tiger, and I at once surmised that it was some such animal that was causing the trouble. But it turned out I was wrong.

"It is not a tiger, *sahib,*" Ramzan translated, after the man had replied to my question. "He says it is a gigantic python."

"A python?—a man-eating python?" I cried in amazement, my interest now at fever-heat. Many were the stories I had heard of the terrible power possessed by these huge reptiles, which, although lacking the poison-fangs common to the majority of Indian snakes, are nevertheless as much dreaded as any viper or cobra. They rely upon their immense power of muscular contraction to overcome their prey, encircling the victim in their deadly folds and crushing it to a pulp before swallowing it whole. But I had certainly never heard of an instance where one had deliberately attacked a village, and I made no secret of the fact that I was somewhat skeptical.

When Ramzan translated my doubts to the man they evoked a perfect torrent of protestations, accompanied by abundant excited gestures.



"The two faces came nearer, the boy's flushed and puzzled, the girl's pale and triumphant."

"What's he getting annoyed about?" I inquired.

"He says it is no ordinary snake, *sahib,*" the Gurkha answered. "It is a fiend—a devil—a beast of Satan—into which the spirit of some long-dead witch has entered. Nobody in the village is safe from it. At first it attacked only the goats and sheep; but now it lies in wait among the terraced rice-fields and springs upon the women as they work. It enters the very huts. It——"

"That will do," I interrupted, as I rose to my feet and made my way toward the quarters occupied by my second in command.

Gordon Meldreuth was in years but little more than a boy, having been drafted to the regiment when he passed out of Sandhurst a couple of years previously. He was a handsome, likable young fellow and, having many tastes in common, we had got on remarkably well together. He was as keen on big-game

hunting as I was myself, and his face lit up with pleasure when I explained the situation to him.

"Of course I shall be only too pleased to come with you, sir," he cried, his eyes roaming round the trophies of the chase with which his room was decorated; from the leopardskin beneath his feet to the magnificent markhor horns above the mantelpiece. "I should like to add a sizable python to the list of my conquests!"

Returning to the orderly-room, I was able to send the messenger away happy with the assurance that on the morrow the two English *sahibs* would, Allah willing, effectually rid his village of the terror which beset it.

RAMZAN MAR accompanied us when we rode down the winding road from the fort at daybreak the following morning, starting thus early in order to get the business over before the heat of the day began.

The Nepalese mountaineers, from whom the Gurkha regiments are recruited, bear the well-deserved reputation of being as good *shikarees* as they are soldiers—which is saying a good deal for their abilities in the hunting line—and Ramzan was no exception to the rule. He was a grave, taciturn man, short in stature as are all his race, and his squat brown features would have undoubtedly failed to win any but a consolation prize at a beauty show. But he was a perfect cragsman, an excellent stalker and an adept in woodcraft generally, being as active and wary as a wildcat. On our arrival at the village he at once set about commandeering the services of all the able-bodied inhabitants to assist as beaters in the chase.

One of the villagers, who had been out early gathering wild honey, had seen the python lying in a deep *nullah,* or gorge, with high, precipitous banks partly clothed in long *nurkal*-grass. So our forces were at once marshaled for the drive in the manner which Ramzan thought best. While the small army of beaters was proceeding to the head of the *nullah,* Meldreuth and I set off on foot to take up a position on a rocky promontory at the farther end, overlooking a spot where the python would have to pass. Scarcely had we arrived there, when there broke out a hideous chorus of whoops, yells and whistles as the beaters dashed into the other end of the gorge like a pack of fox-hounds. I well knew, however, that this ostentatious display of zeal resulted more from the prevailing idea that the greater row each man made the less chance there would be of the python coming near him, than from any eagerness in the pursuit.

Nearer and nearer came the din, until it sounded but a hundred yards or so from where we crouched with ready rifles. Then it became apparent that Ramzan's woodcraft was not at fault. The reed-like *nurkal*-grass round the edge of the little rocky clearing below was gently parted and through it emerged the flat, wicked-looking head of the python.

"Hold thy fire, *sahib,*" whispered Ramzan, who had appeared as silently as a ghost behind us. "Wait till he is well out in the open."

I nodded my head to show that I heard his advice, and my finger took the "first pressure" on the trigger as the reptile began to emerge. It was in no hurry, however, in spite of the uproar behind it. An age seemed to pass before the entire length of its body became visible; but when it was fully revealed I could not help a slight gasp of astonishment escaping me.

Never in the whole course of my Indian experience had I even so much as heard tell of such a gigantic creature. The girth of the largest part of its body must have been at least three feet and its length at least thirty. By those who have only seen a python in a cage at the Zoological Society's Gardens, or a stuffed specimen in a museum, it may perhaps be thought that the mosaic-like markings of brilliant orange, brown and black would render it a conspicuous enough object; but, actually, the very reverse is the case. As the creature wound its sinuous way among the small boulders and clumps of sun-dried grass, it harmonized admirably with the color of its surroundings. Those seemingly conspicuous black stripes so nearly resembled the shadows cast by the stones and grass-stems that, had the python remained motionless, it would have been extremely difficult to detect its presence.

But I had little time in which to admire this example of nature's protective coloring. The python was now in the center of the little clearing—it seemed almost impossible to miss. I took careful aim along the sights and gently squeezed the final pressure on my trigger. At the same moment Gordon Meldreuth fired.

That python seemed to bear a charmed life! I saw the flash of my explosive bullet as it impinged on the rocks a few inches from the creature's head. Meldreuth was using solid, but the sharp *thud* of his bullet on the stones, instead of the unmistakable dull *plop* which it makes on striking flesh, told the same tale of an inglorious miss.

"*Ne lugga!* [missed him]," whispered Ramzan in a tone of bitter disappointment; then—"Quick, *sahib!* Shoot again before he is out of sight."

Once more our rifles spoke. But by this time the now thoroughly alarmed reptile had so changed its position that the sun was shining directly into our eyes, making accurate sighting difficult. Whether it was due to this fact, or to the feelings of exasperation at our first bungling, I know not. The only thing I am certain of is that, so far as injuring the python was concerned, we might have been merely pelting him with pebbles. Fortunately for the chase, however, his progress was now over fairly open ground, so that we could catch an occasional glimpse of his body as it wound in and out amid the boulders. He seemed to be making directly toward a spot on the left bank of the *nullah* where the sheer limestone cliff rose in a kind of natural dome, at the base of which—in spite of our efforts to head him off—he at length disappeared.

"*Shabash!* [bravo]," cried Ramzan, pointing to the numerous well-defined tracks among the beaten grass, showing the trails were frequently used. "We have him now, *sahib*. This is his lair."

As usual, the *shikaree* wasted but little time in words. Drawing his *kookerie*—that heavy curved knife which is a characteristic part of the Gurkhas' equipment, and which they are in the habit of using as much for domestic as for fighting purposes—he at once set to work hacking away the undergrowth around the place where the python had gone to earth. Presently he paused in his task and beckoned me to approach.

One glance was sufficient to show me that the place where the python had taken refuge was no natural fissure in the rock. The entrance was an arched doorway, richly decorated with native sculptures, the weather-worn appearance of which seemed to indicate an extreme antiquity. Immediately above the lintel was a large statue, which at first glance I

thought was supposed to represent a mermaid. Closer inspection, however, convinced me that I was looking upon an idol of a Hindoo goddess, Näga-Kanya, the Snake Princess, who, half snake, half woman, is still worshipped by thousands of devotees.

"Why, this must be one of those old cave-temples dedicated to the snake-goddess, of which I have heard so much," cried Gordon Meldreuth; adding with a laugh, "Well, Mister Python has certainly sought sanctuary in an appropriate spot!"

I noticed Ramzan's eyes narrow suddenly at the words. As befits a true son of the prophet, he was accustomed to profess a supreme contempt for every brand of superstition not orthodox to his own faith; although later on I had cause to suspect that he was not so indifferent to the gods of the Hindoos as he affected to be. But the villagers themselves made no secret of their feelings. They hung back, gathering into knots and talking eagerly in low, awed tones, occasionally casting terrified glances at the statue over the cave-door. It was clear that the fact of the python seeking refuge in the Temple of Näga-Kanya presented itself as no mere coincidence to their superstitious minds.

By this time the brushwood was entirely cleared away from the entrance, and Ramzan sheathed his *kookerie* and looked inquiringly at me.

Now, I do not mind admitting that had I been alone I should have given up the hunt there and then; for the prospect of seeking the python in its lair sent a tingling sensation down my spine merely to think of it. But I knew that the eyes of the whole crowd were upon me watching for the least sign of funk in the English *sahib*. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to unsling my rifle and make toward the cave with such outward appearance of determination as I could assume.

The interior of the place was lit by a dim half-light, which filtered through a creeper-grown aperture high up in one of the walls. Pausing a few seconds to allow my eyes to grow accustomed to the semi-obscurity, I advanced step by step, my rifle held ready in my hands, searching the shadows on either side for some sign of the python. I breathed more freely when I had arrived opposite the gap through which the light entered, for here one could at least see the surrounding objects with tolerable distinctness; and here, to my unbounded surprize, I perceived evidence that at some period or other the cavern must have been occupied by a human being. A kind of rude couch of skins stood in one corner, together with a few earthenware vessels of primitive manufacture.

I had, however, but little time in which to take in the full significance of these details, for at that moment I became aware of two small points of light shining amid the inky blackness of the farther end of the cavern. They were the eyes of the python, intently watching my every movement!

For perhaps a full minute I stood stock-still, gazing at those two specks of greenish fire. Then—it may have been my imagination, or merely the natural effect of the straining of my own eyes in the darkness, but it seemed as if those bright, watching eyes were getting larger—nearer—that the python was silently writhing its way toward me as I stood.

Who has not heard of the hypnotic effect of a snake's direct gaze? Many were the accounts I had heard of that strange, uncanny power—heard and disbelieved—but at that moment I was on the point of receiving positive and practi-

cal proof of the matter. I felt a sense of mental numbness stealing over me; all danger seemed to be forgotten in a dreamy speculation as to what would happen next; all power of making effort seemed to be paralyzed. It appeared that there was no other course open to me but to wait there, silent, motionless, for the inevitable.

Then some flicker of my fast-expiring consciousness warned me of the peril in which I stood—that unless I roused myself and threw off the fatal lethargy, I was lost. Blindly, mechanically—almost, I may say, unconsciously—I raised my rifle and let drive with both barrels.

Fortunately the distance which separated us was so short that a miss was impossible. The two points of fire were extinguished as though they had been snuffed out by an invisible hand, and the next instant the cave was filled with the violent contortions of the reptile's coils in their last death-throes.

Scarcely had the smoke from the double discharge cleared away, when I saw another pair of eyes gleaming from the opposite corner. Heavens! had I penetrated into a perfect nest of pythons?

Even as the thought crossed my mind I was conscious of something brushing across my cheek. Whether it was some large moth, or dark-loving bat disturbed by the noise of my shots, I did not pause to consider. Without even waiting to reload my rfie, I turned tail and—well, let us call it, "retreated with all speed."

"*Two* of them?" cried Gordon Meldreuth, when I had explained what had happened.

I nodded. "I have accounted for one."

"And the other is coming out now. Listen!" he interrupted.

A slight, vague noise was approaching toward the mouth of the cavern, and something appeared indistinctly in the gloom. In a flash Meldreuth had thrown his rifle to his shoulder.

"Hold!" cried Ramzan Mar, suddenly knocking up his weapon so that it exploded harmlessly in the air. "That is no python, *sahib*."

The *shikaree's* quick sense of hearing had not deceived him. A second later, to our unbounded amazement, there advanced into the sunlight a young girl, slight, graceful and well-formed.

So unexpected was her appearance that for a space in which one might count a hundred nobody moved or spoke. We stood—the beaters, Ramzan, Meldreuth and myself—like men suddenly frozen into stone, staring at the girl as she slowly advanced toward us.

She was not a native—or if she were she belonged to a caste with which I was unacquainted. Her skin was as light as any European's, and her features, framed in masses of waving black hair flowing loose on her shoulders, were of an almost classical regularity. In their flawless perfection they resembled more the ideal sculptures of ancient Greece than a creature of flesh and blood. Her tall, supple form was draped in the folds of a strange, iridescent garment; formed, I subsequently noted, out of the semi-transparent cast skins of snakes, and over her rounded bosom there fell a long necklace composed of the threaded teeth of the same reptile.

As we stood there, amazed and wondering, there came a yell of terror from the beaters, and with one accord they took to their heels, shouting out some unintelligible gibberish as they disappeared in the jungle.

"What are the fools shouting about?" Meldreuth asked, impatiently addressing Ramzan Mar.

"They say that this maiden is Nāga Kanya, the goddess of the snakes—she

who crushes the life out of mortal men with her embrace or poisons them with her kiss, O *sahib,*" the Gurkha answered. Although the man endeavored to infuse into his reply some of his customary contempt, I could see by the expression on his usually impassive face that his mind was not entirely at ease.

But Gordon Meldreuth only laughed aloud.

"The fools fear that she will crush them in her embrace, do they?" he cried, his eyes fixed on the graceful figure before him. Then he laughed again. "Well, one might die a far less pleasant death than that!"

They were words spoken light-heartedly and in jest; words which were probably forgotten by him almost as soon as they had left his lips. But they were words which, in the light of after-events, were destined to remain inscribed on my mind with letters of fire, like a warning written by the prophetic finger of fate.

NIGHT—an Indian night.

Not the windless, stifling night of the Plains, which seems but a brief spell of heat-laden darkness between two baking days, but a night amid the upper slopes of the Himalayas; where the wind, cooled over miles of glaciers, fills the lungs with its icy, exhilarating breath.

The moon had just topped the crests of the distant crags rising along the ridge of eternal snow, and was lighting up such a sublimely grand prospect of fell, forest and flood as could hardly be surpassed the world over. Our fort was set on a broad, jutting spur of rock commanding the pass below. On either side the mountains rose in rugged precipices, rocky amphitheaters, and gigantic buttresses toward the naked peaks which stood out in grand yet awful magnificence against the silvery sky. Glaciers lay in the hollows between some of the higher spurs, while broad fields of virgin snow filled the head of the main valley. To the right, so near that the wind drifted the spray across the angles of the narrow, winding path leading up to the gate of the fort, there fell from above a foaming torrent which, roaring sullenly below, filled the valley with its deep, never-ending resonance. Farther down, the steep mountainsides were dark with vast tracks of somber-hued deodar forests rent here and there by long lines of uprooted and splintered trees, masses of earth-soiled snow and débris marking the course of avalanches which had swept from the towering heights above.

Such was the prospect spread out before me as I leaned over the stone parapet of the fort, smoking and musing over the events of the day. We had returned to the fort about nightfall, the mysterious girl accompanying us. I had been desirous of leaving her at the village in the foot-hills; but when we called there on our way back, the inhabitants resolutely refused to allow her to enter, finally backing up their refusal with volleys of stones and curses.

"Take the snake-witch from our doors, O *sahib,*" they had shouted. "Are we weary of our lives that we should give shelter to Nāga-Kanya, the daughter of death and destruction? Take her hence, O *sahib,* or we will surely slay her."

After that there was no alternative but to lodge her in the fort until I could have her sent under escort down the Rotang Pass to Sultanpur, where she would be in safe and kindly hands at the mission-home.

Who was this girl? Where did she come from? By what train of extraordinary circumstances had she been enabled to enter, unharmed, into that python-haunted temple of the snake-goddess? Meldreuth and I had discussed these

questions over dinner without arriving at any satisfactory solution. Nor could the Gurkha sergeant Ramzan Mar enlighten us. He had questioned her in every one of the hill dialects without eliciting the least sign of understanding. As to the language which she herself spoke, Ramzan emphatically called upon Allah and the Prophet to witness that he had never before heard it spoken. One word she had repeated many times, "Vasantasena," at the same time pointing to herself. This, we assumed, was her name; for when we uttered the strange sibilant syllables she would nod and smile as though pleased. At the same time I noted that her smiles were sunniest when it was the young and handsome Gordon Meldreuth who spoke her name. She seemed to attach herself to him as a matter of course; for such a grizzled old veteran as myself she had scarcely a second glance.

A QUICK step on the concrete flagging of the courtyard roused me from my revery. It was Gordon Meldreuth. As he came toward me, carrying his topee in his hand, as though to let the cool night breeze play on his uncovered head, the moonlight fell full upon his face. Maybe the cold white rays deceived my eyes, but it seemed to me as if his features were as colorless as marble and that his usually bright eyes were dull and troubled.

"I've warned the men who are to form the escort tomorrow, sir," he reported. "When do they parade?"

"At daybreak," I answered. "We at least owe it to the girl to get her as soon as possible to a place where she will be well looked after by sympathetic persons of her own sex. Then it may be discovered who she is and where she comes from."

"Yes," Meldreuth said, after a long pause. "Perhaps it will be best. Poor Vasantasena!"

I half turned and, under pretense of knocking the ash from my cigar, flashed a quick look into the young officer's face. There had been such a wealth of wistful tenderness in his voice as he uttered the sibilant accents of her strange name—a name which somehow vaguely suggested the hissing of a snake—that the suspicion which had been forming in my mind for the past few hours now flashed into sudden certainty. My impressionable young subaltern had fallen in love with this jungle girl!

"Yes," I repeated, this time in a tone of grim conviction. "It certainly is best that she should leave here."

If he noticed the irony of my utterance he gave no sign. For awhile he remained silently gazing at the distant moonlit peaks; then he passed his hand wearily across his forehead and laughed unsteadily.

"I'm not subject to nerves, sir, as you know"—he spoke with that constrained awkwardness of a man imparting a confidence of which he is half ashamed—"but tonight I have an unaccountable foreboding of coming calamity. If we were on the verge of a big push I could understand the feeling. But all is quiet on the frontier—yet death seems to hover in the very air."

I was now staring at the man in genuine astonishment. Had I not seen him dozens of times under heavy fire, and had I not known him for one of the coolest officers under my command, I should have thought he was suffering from funk—which was absurd. Yet here he was talking about "forebodings" like any nervous schoolgirl. He must have guessed what was passing in my mind, for:

"I know it sounds like so much absolute rot, sir," he said with a laughing shrug, "but the feeling is there all the same. I wouldn't have spoken of it, only

we've been something more to each other than mere messroom acquaintances, and—if anything should happen to me—I want you to look after"—again his voice grew softer as he uttered the name—"Vasantasena."

"Of course I'll do my best for the girl," I rejoined, somewhat impatiently. "But what is likely to happen to you? The hill tribes are quiet. What danger——"

"Hullo! What's up with the sentry?"

Meldreuth broke in suddenly with the words as he pointed to the Gurkha on guard. The man had come to a halt at the farther angle of the parapet, and although he had not challenged, was looking intently at something directly below. In a moment we had hurried to his side.

"What is it, sentry?" I asked.

THE man straightened up, came to the slope, and saluted before he answered:

"A snake, *sahib*. There—on the path below. And there is another—and another! By Allah! every snake in the mountains hath come at the call of that accursed witch-girl!"

Extraordinary as the assertion sounded, it certainly seemed as if it were true. The rays of the full moon lit up the landscape below until it appeared like a model carved in shimmering silver. By its light, almost as clear as day, we beheld a terrifying sight. From the dark forests of deodar-cedar, from the boulders lining the zigzag path to the fort, from the thickets of grass and reeds bordering the rushing stream — from every scrap of cover, it seemed—there emerged an ever-increasing multitude of creeping things.

Huge pythons, hooded cobras, slender whip-snakes, deadly puff-adders—every poisonous and loathsome thing that crawls was there—all forming one wave of hideous gliding death—all converging to the path which led up to the fort in which we stood.

"Guard . . . turn out! Bugler, sound 'Fall in'."

Meldreuth rapped out the orders smartly. There was no hint of nervousness about him now. In spite of his recent talk about premonitions, here, in the face of actual danger, he was ice-cool.

"Machine-gunners—to your emplacements. . . . Rifles, line the parapet. Bombers, make ready! . . . Point-blank range—independent firing. Take your own time, men, and let 'em have it hot. Rapid . . . load!"

For one brief second there sounded the faint metallic clicking as the cartridge-clips were pressed into the magazines and the breech-bolts thrust home. The next instant the peaceful stillness of the valley gave place to a pandemonium of hell. The fort had only two small guns belonging to a mule battery, but what we lacked in artillery was amply made up for in small arms and bombs. The quick rattle of the rifles; the sustained whirring of the machine-guns; the sharp bark of the little nine-pounders; the dull thudding explosions of the Mills' bombs—all combined to make up a devil's harmony difficult indeed to surpass.

Such was the mass of reptiles wedged in the gorge below that every shot must have told. But their numbers seemed endless. As fast as one rank of the mass was blown into writhing fragments, another advanced to take its place. The little white path was now black with the reptiles, living and dead. But in spite of the appalling hail of lead showered upon it, that nightmare host crept nearer and ever nearer to the gate of the fort.

"Steady, men. Keep cool and fire low. Gunners, concentrate on the head of the column."

And so the conflict went on; and a more

fierce or fantastic one was never waged on this planet—and probably never will be.

"*Sahib*—Meldreuth *sahib!*"

So engrossed had I been in the scene before me that I had all this time scarcely given a thought to the girl Vasantasena. But as these words fell on my ear, uttered in a soft whisper, the memory of the strange circumstances under which we had found her rushed back to my mind. I remembered the superstitious awe in which the natives held her—her dress of pythons' skins—her home in the den—and the horde of snakes which now beset us. Small wonder was it that my brain was in a confused whirl as I turned round at the sound of her voice, speaking, for the first time, intelligible words.

THE jungle girl was standing immediately in the rear of the firing-line. Her hair was unloosened, flowing about her breast and shoulders and showing up their gleaming whiteness against its raven hue. Her eyes were shining with excitement; her lips parted in a smile—it seemed of triumph. Her lissom form was swaying, undulating, like some graceful palm shaken in the wind—or like some serpent about to strike. . . .

"Meldreuth *sahib,*" again she uttered his name; and yet again: "Meldreuth!"

I saw the boy turn and for a space look into her deep, compelling eyes; standing like a man fascinated—entranced. Then he took a step forward and caught the swaying figure in his arms.

"There is no danger——" he began: but his voice died away and a look of wonder came into his face. For her slender white arms had enfolded themselves about his neck; her lithe body pressed close to his. Nearer and nearer came the two faces—the boy's flushed, half puzzled; the girl's pale, coldly triumphant—her eyes never for an instant quitting his—until at last their lips were pressed together in a lingering, passionate kiss.

"*Bismallah!* The snakes are at the gate!"

The frenzied shout from the parapet caused me to turn my eyes. It was true. About the one slender barrier which stood between the teeming horde and ourselves there was piled a mass of reptiles—I heard the timbers creak and groan beneath their weight. Bombs were useless now—they would only serve to blow in our own defenses. I shouted the order for the rifles to take up their position on the towers flanking the gate, and began to lead the way. But I had not taken a couple of strides before a terrible cry, coming from behind, caused me to stop dead.

Gordon Meldreuth was still on the same spot where I had last seen him, but instead of being in the embrace of Vasantasena he was now struggling in the coils of an immense python!

Heaven alone knows by what means it had gained access to the fort; nor was there time even to consider such a matter. With the rapidity of a whirling whip-lash, the rest of the creature's body wrapped itself round his legs, throwing him to the ground.

Even in the brief second that I stood fumbling with the flap of my revolver-holster I saw the terrible coils contract, and heard the sound—such as I never wish to hear again—as the bone-crushing pressure was exerted.

Revolver in hand, I dashed forward.

But Ramzan Mar was readier than I. He appeared as if by magic by the side of the pair in that devil's embrace, and raised his rifle until it almost touched the reptile's head. Then came a sudden flash of fire—a sharp report—and the hideous head disappeared—blown into space by the near discharge.

Snatching a *kookerie* from the belt of

the nearest man, I assisted Ramzan in hacking asunder the still palpitating coils of the python, until at last we had poor Meldreuth free. But one glance into his face was enough to tell me that he was doomed.

For a few seconds I stood, half dazed, looking down at the pitiful wreck of what, a few minutes before, had been a man full of life and the desire to live. Then a sudden thought came to me.

"Where is Vasantasena?" I asked of Ramzan.

"There, O *sahib,*" the man answered, pointing with his reddened blade to the faintly moving fragments of the python.

"There?" I repeated, aghast, as the sinister import of his words came home to me. "There? Are you mad, *havildar?*"

Ramzan shrugged grimly.

"At least she is not within the fort, *sahib,*" he declared.

"You talk like a child—not a man!" I cried roughly, trying to fight down the ghastly conviction which was taking hold of my mind. "If the girl is not here she must have contrived to lower herself over the wall of the fort, and so escape."

The grim old *shikaree* did not answer at once. Instead, he stooped slowly and raised from the ground some tattered fragments of snakeskin, such as composed the dress of Vasantasena. Stooping again, he disentangled a string of blood-stained objects—the necklace which she was accustomed to wear—and held it aloft.

"The snake-girl changed back into her natural form even as she held the captain-*sahib* in her arms," he asserted solemnly. "Of a truth, *sahib,* she was indeed—Nāga-Kanya, the queen of all the snakes. That is why they attacked the fort. Her subjects came at her command—and at her death they depart! Look, *sahib!*"

The Gurkha pointed over the parapet as he spoke.

Not a living creature remained in the pass below. But at the farther end of the gorge toward the foot-hills and jungles of the plains, a dark, undulating mass was slowly fading out of sight.

The Brain-Eaters

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

A shuddery tale about the dead men who sat in the boat, and a weird horror from four-dimensional space

STEPHEN WILLIAMSON, anthropologist and archeologist, stood at the rail of the *Morning Star* and watched the dim gray shape of the long boat shed its hazy indistinctness as the sun penetrated the fog and threw ruddy curlicues athwart the gleaming gunwales. From where Williamson was standing the occupants of the boat were distinctly visible. They sat immobile, in grotesque attitudes, and when Williamson hailed them they made no response. Williamson craned forward over the rail, studying them intently out of bloodshot eyes. Then, suddenly, his body went tense, and a cold horror descended upon him. He turned abruptly, cupping his hands, and shouted out a frantic warning

"They came for Thomas last night, but they did not take all of him. He is sitting before me as I write."

to the first mate, who was standing rather nonchalantly amidships with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets.

"Keep away from her! Ease her off! For God's sake——"

"What's that?" The mate strode to the rail and glanced anxiously over the side. But from where he was standing the boat was not visible. He was obliged to repeat his query to Williamson, who occupied, for the moment, the position of ship's guardian. Below in his cabin the captain was raving impotently, his brain unhinged by liquor and fever.

"What did you say, Steve?"

"I said—stay clear of her!"

"Why?"

"Cholera, I think. Anyhow, it's awful! A death-trap. Keep clear of her."

In a moment the mate was by Stephen's side, staring with horror at the boat and its contents. It was drifting aimlessly in a long swell, its rudder askew and trailing sea-moss, its oarlocks sodden with caked salt and a darker, more disturbing ingredient that looked, from a distance, like caked blood. The mate gripped Williamson's arm. "They've been dead for weeks," he muttered, hoarsely. "Every man of 'em. They're nothin' more than skeletons." He spat to conceal his emotion. "Every man of 'em. God, Steve——"

"Look there!" Williamson had raised his arm and was pointing excitedly at the tallest of the seven skeletons.

The mate grew dizzy with horror. A choking, gurgling sound issued from his throat, and his hand tightened on his companion's arm till the latter cried out in shrill protest. "Steady, Jim." Then, after a pause, "It was cannibalism. Nothing else. But I can understand it, Jim. If

the poor devils were insane, crazed——"

"But his *head,*" the mate protested hysterically. "They couldn't eat that. Why did they cut off his head?"

The headless man sat bolt upright in the boat. He was clothed in stained gray trousers of woolen texture and a coarse seaman's shirt of alternating black and white stripes open to the waist. His feet were bare and sun-scorched. One arm, severed at the wrist, dangled forlornly from beside the oarlocks, rising and falling with the slow oily swell. The other was outstretched, as though it had been endeavoring, at the instant of death, to ward off the attack of something malign and unspeakable. On several parts of the hairy, exposed chest were dark and ominous stains. The muscles of the torso stood out so rigidly in the half-light that they were discernible at a distance of fifty feet.

But despite his mutilations and imperfections the headless man was easily the most commanding figure in the boat. The other occupants were pitiable in the extreme. They sprawled against the gunwales in attitudes of abject despair—mere husks of flabby skin over protruding bones, with skull-like faces and rigid, immobile arms. The sea had had its way with them. They were not merely dead; they were beginning, slowly, to blacken and shrivel and putrefy.

"It isn't cholera," said Stephen grimly.

The mate nodded. "You're right, I guess." His voice sounded hollow and unfamiliar even to his own ears. The strangeness of its timbre appalled him. He glanced almost hysterically at his companion. How, he wondered, could the man remain so cool? He had hitherto been so emotional, so easily upset. Yet now, somehow, the scientist in him was rising to the occasion, was astonishing the mate by his assurance and poise.

"We may as well lower a boat," said Stephen decisively. "I want to know precisely what happened. It's utterly ghastly, but I've got to know."

THIRTY minutes later a decidedly ill scientist crossed the deck of the *Morning Star* in a strangely indirect fashion; crossed the deck in a semi-daze and gripped the rail till his knuckles showed white. For a moment he stood watching a Portuguese man-of-war scudding over the oily sea, his gaze remaining riveted on the weirdly beautiful polyp till it disappeared in the purple haze fringing the horizon. Then, abruptly, he wheeled and met the inquisitorial scrutiny of the mate.

"Well?"

"I told Harris to put—sew sheets on the bodies," said Stephen in a cold and lifeless voice. "The least we can do is give them a decent burial."

The mate shivered. "I hope we can get it over with soon. A crew of dead men don't suit my fancy. If the captain should see 'em—in his condition, you know, it wouldn't be pleasant. I told Simpson to keep watch on the old man."

"I'm more concerned about the crew," said Stephen slowly. "They've been whispering and muttering ever since we brought the bodies aboard. Frightened blue, I guess. I don't know as I blame them. If they could see this diary"—Stephen tapped his pocket significantly—"they might—run amuck. To tell you the truth, Jim, it's got me frightened. I don't know what to think."

The mate moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "It's crazy gibberish, Steve," he muttered. "They went through hell, apparently, and it's my guess this fellow Henderson cracked up under the strain. Bein' an officer and a gentleman—well, any one could see he was only a frightened kid. I don't think I ever saw a man's face so drawn and despairful-lookin'."

Stephen removed a weather-stained memorandum book from his pocket and began nervously to finger the pages. "There are things here, Jim," he said, "that you can't argue away. Descriptions, details. I'm convinced those men encountered something appalling. No thirst-crazed lunatic could have been so devilishly, inhumanly *logical*. Henderson remained courageously cool-headed to the very last. This entry shows what stuff the kid was made of."

Stephen had opened the book, and as the mate stared silently down into the almost motionless sea he began, slowly, to read:

"THEY want our *brains*. Last night one of them got in touch with me. It laid its cool face against my forehead and spoke to me. I could understand everything it said. A terrible death awaits us if we do not obey them implicitly. They want Thomas. We are to make no attempt to thwart or resist them when they come for him.

"Later.—They came for Thomas last night. *They did not take all of him.* He is sitting before me now. I can see his broad shoulders and back as I write. They are limned very terribly against the glare of the sunset, and they obtrude with a terrible vividness. His presence is a perpetual horror, but we dare not throw him overboard. *They* would not approve.

"I am perfectly sane. The horror has not dulled in any way my perception of the visible realities about me. I know that I am adrift in the Pacific, fifty miles perhaps off the coast of Salvador, and that I am compelled to endure the presence of a headless corpse and five cowardly fools who gibber and moan like baboons merely because they lack guts and haven't sufficient water. My own stoicism bewilders and amazes me. Why is it that my hand does not tremble as I write, that I can remain so observant, so calm? It may be that I have lost all capacity to suffer. We have passed into a strange world—an alien and utterly incomprehensible world which makes the fears and agonies of common life seem curiously impersonal and remote.

"We have abandoned all hope of a possible rescue. Nothing can save us from *them*. It is amazing how completely I have resigned myself to the inevitable. Three days ago we were as confident as the devil. Why, we actually jested when the *Mary O'Brien* went down. Red Taylor called it a natty dive. She went down bow first. It was an enormously impressive spectacle. The water about her was a white maelstrom for fully five minutes.

" 'It's only a few miles to the coast,' I told them, 'and we've enough water to last a fortnight. We'll row in relays.'

"*They* are aquat and slimy, with long gelatinous arms and hideous, bat-like faces. But I have reason to suspect they can change their form at will. For hours our ears were assailed by a horrible, maddening droning, and then—*we saw them.* We saw them glistening in the moonlight. All about us the sea was carpeted with their luminous, malignant faces. There was nothing we could do. We were helpless—stunned.

"*They are not animals.* They are indued with a cold, unearthly intelligence. We have drifted into strange waters. Our compass revolves so maddeningly that it is useless as a guide. I have a theory — incredible, fantastic — which would account for all that has occurred, but I dare not confide it to the others. They would not understand. They are convinced, even now, that the things are fantastic fishes. They do not know that I have communicated with *them*. They did not see me last night when I left the boat and went with *them* into the abyss.

They were deceived by the presence of my physical body, which remained with them in the boat. They did not suspect that I had descended into the dark, cold abyss.

"They were strangely reticent. They merely confided to me that they wanted Thomas' brain. They feed, it seems, on human brains, and of all our brains Thomas' is the most finely organized. It is compact, imaginative, sensitive. He is a semi-illiterate A. B. S., but his brain is first-rate. What interests them primarily is not so much the culture or cultivation which a brain has acquired, but simply its naked intelligence. They experience strange, vivid new emotions and sensations when they feed on unspoiled human brains. But they do not really *eat* our brains. Rather, they suck, absorb them. They wrap themselves tightly about human heads, and suck out the contents of the cranium through the eyes and nostrils.

They do not always carry away the heads which they desire to use in this fashion. Occasionally they merely extract the brain while the victim is asleep. In such cases the poor wretch is certain to awake a raving maniac. Sightless—and a maniac. The other way is more merciful. I am glad that they severed Thomas' head and took it away. The presence of his body is a horror and a madness—but it is reassuring to know that he has ceased to suffer. The men are showing the effects of the torture. Brett has been whimpering pitifully for hours and Lang is as helpless as an infant. They want to throw Thomas' body into the sea, but I won't give my consent.

"*They* live at the bottom of the sea and are not a part of our familiar world. They inhabit another dimension. By some ghastly and inexplicable mischance we have passed into another dimension of space. We have passed into an *extension* of the three-dimensional world. The existence of these creatures confirms the wildest speculations of theosophists and mystics, who have persistently maintained that man is not the only intelligent inhabitant of the globe—that there are other worlds impinging on ours. Above the familiar seas of the world are imposed other invisible seas inhabited by strange and hideous shapes utterly unlike anything with which we are familiar. There is not one Pacific Ocean merely. Occupying the same space *in another dimension* are invisible Pacifics inhabited by strange shapes with hidden, malevolent powers. We have, unaccountably, sailed into one of these invisible worlds. We have passed from the coast of Salvador to the seacoast of an alien world.

"It is a very terrible world. Its denizens are more malignant than vampires. They raven on the brains of lost travellers from the three-dimensional Pacific.

"I had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion when they came for me and compelled me to follow them down through the blue depths to their strange, blue-litten city on the sea's floor.

"My body remained in the boat, but my brain was with them at the bottom of the sea. They can separate the brain *temporarily* from the body without any physical sundering. They were careful to explain to me why I should not share the fate of Thomas. They *need* me. I have been enjoined to guard Thomas' body—to keep the others from throwing it into the sea.

"Another ship has passed into this strange and hideous world. On it there is a brain which they covet—an extraordinary brain—the brain of a scientist and poet. They desire to absorb it, and they desire to absorb it while it is aflame with curiosity and maddened by fright. When they can absorb a highly evolved brain that is keyed up to a pitch of wild ex-

citement they experience the most intense ecstasy and rapture. So peculiarly are they constituted that they are capable of deriving the most piercing pleasure from highly evolved, highly inflamed cerebral tissue. In our world rare or alien manifestations of energy like radium, cosmic rays and things of that kind react most violently on terrestrial organisms and it is very conceivable that in this other world animal tissue—especially such highly evolved tissue as one finds in human brains—reacts with a similar intensity upon the alien body-substances of these creatures.

"The scientist—the man who is coming—has a brain which excites them immeasurably. They are determined to frighten and inflame it, and they think that if its possessor encounters Thomas sitting upright in the boat, headless and ghastly, it will become a rare delicacy and afford them the most exquisite rapture. They have asked me to help them and I dare not refuse. But I can at least record what I know and suspect in this book, and if he is not a blind fool he will strive to escape.

"I fear, though, that he is lost—hopelessly and irremediably lost.

"Like us he has in some mysterious way passed into another world. The ship which bears him has been drawn—sucked into some great vacuum or vent in three-dimensional space and is now in an utterly alien world. A black and abysmal world. Nothing *on earth* can save him. His naked intelligence, perhaps—but nothing on earth. The brain-eaters will not spare him.

"They will fasten upon his skull and drain it dry. His eyes will be drawn from their sockets, and his brain will melt and dissolve like tallow in the sun. Their moist, dark mouths——

"I am very ill. The ocean about me is carpeted with leering, malignant faces. The others see them, too. Brett is cringing and whining and foaming at the mouth like an epileptic, and Adams has collapsed against the gunwale. Blood is trickling from his nose and his eyes are drawn inward. His face is a mask—a corpse-mask. There is nothing we can do or say. We sit lifelessly by the oars and stare at Thomas' ghastly body, which has become a mockery, a menace. I have resigned all hope——"

WILLIAMSON closed the book and glanced anxiously at the man beside him. "Wouldn't you say, Jim, that there was *something* behind it?"

Jim looked exceedingly ill. "I don't know. It's all so very queer—uncanny. If there's any truth in it it's *your* brain they're after."

Williamson nodded. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Jim. I'm going to sleep on deck tonight. I'll bring up my cot and sleep here. I'll feel safer, somehow, on deck."

The mate lowered his head. "I'd do that," he said, simply.

It was after midnight when Williamson awoke and sat up. The moonlight lay in bright, luminous stripes on his cot and the wet planks of the deck. The lifeboats stood out boldly in the silver light, and from where he lay three huge water-barrels and a great pile of tarred rope were plainly visible. At first Williamson saw only these dim, familiar shapes; the water-barrels, the rope, the lifeboats swaying reassuringly in the wind. Then, slowly, he became aware of something dark and cumbersome, something opaque that obscured his vision and concealed a portion of the second barrel, something that made a pie-shaped dent in the pile of cordage. He rubbed his eyes; slowly, at first, then violently,

hysterically. *A dark shape was clinging to the heavy netting above his bed.*

For a moment he stared at it in stark bewilderment. Then a great horror came upon him and he shrank back against the pillows. It was clinging to the netting and moving backward and forward like a great, slow-moving beetle. It was a moving blot, concealing the stars—a fetid dark blot against the spectral moon.

Nausea welled up within him. He started to rise, and then, suddenly, grew sick with terror incalculable. The strength ebbed from his limbs and his mind refused to function. He lay supine upon the coarse sheets, too stricken to move or cry out. The thing was slowly changing its shape. It was assuming a more definite contour, was waxing more malignant and agile. Stephen's eyes followed it helplessly as it moved up and down the netting. It was acquiring sight. It was acquiring the loathsome capacity to return his stare. Two luminous spots glowed malevolently down at him from its crawling bulk.

It was globular, and *wet*. From its dark sac-like body depended eight squirming tentacles. Or were they limbs? It was impossible to be certain. They were so maddeningly weaving and indistinct, at one moment swelling in girth, and then becoming so incredibly wire-like that they seemed to merge with the mesh of the netting which sustained them. But that the arms ended in thin, claw-like hands he did not for a moment doubt. The hands were too constantly visible, too patently sinister. They fumbled with the netting, as though seeking to draw it apart.

He managed, somehow, to rise upon his elbows, to extend, invitingly, his exposed throat. It was not death he feared. It was the torture, the suspense. He could no longer bear to look into the horror's eyes. He had endured with agonized fortitude the sight of its drooling, bat-like mouth, and the odor of putrefaction, the sea-stench which surged from it; and even the fetid, fleshless hands with their long luminous fingers had not incited him to complete surrender. But its eyes held a threat which could not be evaded or endured. He did not want them to come any closer. If the hands broke through and the eyes came closer——

It was better to surrender unreservedly to the hands. So he raised himself on his elbow and bared his throat. It was a full minute before he perceived that he had been mistaken and that the hands were not seeking his throat.

They were busily engaged in recovering from the wet deck a large, round object of disturbingly familiar appearance. The thing had evidently been compelled to lay this object down for a moment in order to facilitate its ascent to the netting above Williamson's bed, and it was now intent on recovering its gruesome trophy. Slowly, deliberately, it raised the object in its terribly thin arms, caressing and fondling it, holding it very close, for a moment, to its moist and bulbous mouth. And in that same instant a hideous droning, that was like the thrum of huge engines in some vast and reverberant power-plant, smote menacingly on Williamson's ear. It was not the droning, however, which drove Williamson shrieking from the bed and across the deck in a straight dash toward the rail. It was something much more unendurable than any sound on earth.

It was the sight of a face, blue-cheeked and tortured, with matted red beard and white, pupilless eyes—a face distraught, yet immobile—a face that grimaced and glowered, and yet remained strangely, alarmingly impassive—the face of a dead man, the face of a corpse. There were dark stains above the temples, and the

matted hair and beard were clotted with blood. The head was neckless—*unattached*. It seemed to float upon the air. In reality, however, it was being held very firmly in the terribly thin arms of something that wanted Williamson's brain, that wanted to do to Williamson what it had done to the object it was so proudly exhibiting. It was displaying the object unashamedly to Williamson because it wanted to terrify him—to appall and terrify him utterly. It wanted to drive Williamson mad with fright so that it could fasten on his inflamed brain and drain it dry.

THE mate, standing unsteadily upon the bridge, was alive to Williamson's peril. He had watched the scientist awake from a troubled sleep and had seen the dark shape moving backward and forward above the latter's head. He had also observed, with an actual physical retching, the round dark object on the deck, before the horror had reclaimed it. He was an imaginative man, and his brain, at that moment, was as agitated as the one which the horror coveted. But a mighty wave of fury against the thing that had come up from the sea blotted the fright from his mind. The barrel of the rifle in his hand glowed like a long blue taper in the moonlight. Slowly, with an almost hysterical deliberation, he raised the weapon to his shoulder and took aim.

The horror screeched twice shrilly as the bullet plowed through its dark body. It fell from the netting, twisted itself into a ball and rolled diagonally toward the scuppers. As it passed over the deck it left a thin blue trail of phosphorescent slime on the wet planks. Williamson turned from the rail, against which he had been clinging, and raised a stricken face toward the bridge. "It's no use," he shrieked. "Too many of them! All about the ship! I'm going!"

He started to climb upon the rail; and then, suddenly, his foot slipped and he went down with a thud. When he raised himself again to a sitting posture he was holding something dark and round between his hands and gibbering insanely. "No top to it! No top at all!" he screamed. "The brain-pan's gone! All sucked dry—nothing inside! Oh my God!"

Two strong hands descended upon the mate's shoulders and abruptly, ruthlessly, he was pushed aside. A tall form in wet, glistening slicker took his place upon the bridge. The mate's eyes widened bewilderingly. "Captain Sayers," he muttered. "Captain Sayers——"

But the captain ignored him. He was shouting out commands at the top of his bursting lungs. "Put every stitch on her," he shouted. "Jump lively there!"

Part of the crew had emerged from the hatches and were running rapidly backward and forward in response to the captain's orders. After a moment he turned to the gasping mate. "We'll get out of this. Do as I say, and we'll get out of this. I know what's happened. We're in the wrong dimension. I was in it once before—years ago. Nothing to fear—if you'll do as I say. I know how to steer her. Five tacks to the right, a twist to the left and we'll be out of it. I *know*. I've been in touch with them for years. I'm psychic."

"Mad," groaned the mate. "Stark, raving mad!"

The captain had left the mate's side and was running frantically toward the wheel. "Keep them at it!" he shouted over his shoulder. "Tell them to square away. Can't put too much sail on her. Can't put too much—do you hear?"

The mate nodded. "Worth tryin'," he muttered to himself. "Follow him im-

plicitly. Nothin' to lose. He's in touch with 'em, maybe. Crazy people *are* psychic. They know things we don't." He raised his voice. "For God's sake, men, be quick. Do as the captain says. It's our only chance."

There ensued a race with destruction. The great ship hove to and trembled ominously, every sail on her taut with the breeze, while from the ocean there arose a screeching and a droning such as no sane man could endure with fortitude. The mate felt his reason tottering, even as the reason of the captain had departed, even as the mind of poor Williamson had succumbed—poor Williamson, who squatted hopelessly on the deck, his right hand supporting a horror of horrors, and his face a distorted mask in the spectral light.

But eventually they won through. The ship, under the captain's guidance, veered strangely on the dark waters. It veered about and rose on a mountainous swell, and even as the captain shouted orders into the attentive ear of the frightened helmsman the droning and screeching diminished in volume. One by one the hideous luminous faces faded from the luminous seas. The wind went down, and the ship floated serenely on a three-dimensional ocean.

FOUR hours later the sun came up over the coastal hills and flooded the ocean with a saffron light. Williamson, serene and at peace, stood silently by the rail and gazed with gratitude at the prone form of Captain Sayers. The captain lay asleep on the bed which the scientist had vacated on the previous night under circumstances which the mate could not bear to recall. But Williamson was the courageous one now. He dared to recall them. He gripped the mate's arm and smiled wanly.

"I'm glad you decided to obey the captain," he said. "Nothing else could have saved us. It was an heroic decision. The captain *knew*, I am convinced. Men whom the world calls insane—sick people, lunatics—are often *en rapport* with the invisible, the hidden. The fourth dimension is an open book to them. They see things which are hidden from us. And the captain *knew*."

The mate nodded. "I'm glad that they didn't take your brain, old fellow. It's too valuable an instrument. Aside"—he added with an ironic smile—"aside from friendship, I'm glad. You can go on with your work now. You can get all that dope on the Mayas you missed last trip."

"I'll not write about the Mayas," said Stephen decisively. "I've much more important information to convey. My next book will deal with—with *them*."

The mate scowled. "No one will believe you."

"Perhaps not. But I'm determined to put that horror on paper. Some one, somewhere, may read it and understand."

The mate shook his head. "You'll lose caste. Your scientific friends will gibe and jeer at you."

Stephen's face set in grim lines. "Let them jeer," he muttered. "The knowledge that I'm in the right will sustain me." He drew himself up. "God, but it was a great experience. It nearly did for me, but I *know*, now, that the world isn't the pretty little affair we've always thought it. *Out beyond* are whetters of cosmic appetites. I've a cosmic appetite, Jim. I like to venture and explore. Perhaps, some day, they'll get my brain, but in the meantime——"

The mate smiled sympathetically. "I can guess how it is," he said. "There ain't any sailor this side of the Horn wouldn't understand. You're always hankerin' for what lies just around the corner."

"Or on the dark side of the moon," amended Stephen, with a wistful smile.

"The poor brute gave a screaming whinny and bolted."

The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

A thrill-tale of murder, human sacrifice, and the infamous Black Mass—a story of devil-worship

The Story Thus Far

BEAUTIFUL Alice Hume vanished during the final rehearsal for her wedding in the presence of her fiancé and a group of friends including her mother, her family physician, Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, and Trowbridge's eccentric associate, the French physician-detective, Doctor Jules de Grandin. The little Frenchman discovered traces of a yellow powder which, he explained to Trowbridge, was *bulala-gwai,* the "little death" used by the natives of the French Congo to produce temporary paralysis. Alice, he declared, had been abducted while the wedding party was rendered unconscious by *bulala-gwai.*

De Grandin also believed that the dis-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for February.

appearance was connected with a girdle of tanned human skin that Alice had worn. The girl told him that the belt was known as "the luck of the Humes" and had been in the family a long time.

He found a concealed document in the family Bible, written by Alice's ancestor, David Hume, and relating how he had been sold as a slave to the devil-worshipping Yezidees, had rescued the daughter of their chief from becoming the "bride of Satan," had married her, and later brought her to America.

Despite a sentence in the old manuscript warning Hume's descendants that an attempt might some time be made to "bring home" one of the daughters of his line, Alice's mother refused to admit any connection between the Yezidees legend and her daughter's disappearance. But that very night Mrs. Hume was found murdered by a strangling-cord in her own boudoir.

De Grandin, joined by Inspector Renouard of the French secret service, and Baron Ingraham, known as "Hiji", of the British secret service, raid the devil-worshippers during a performance of the infamous Black Mass, rescue Alice Hume, kill one of the priests of the cult and capture another.

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18. *Reunion*

LOOKING very charming and demure in a suit of Jules de Grandin's lavender pajamas and his violet-sik dressing-gown, Alice Hume lay upon the chaise-lounge in the bedroom, toying with a grapefruit and poached egg. "If you'd send for Mother, please," she told us, "I'd feel so much better. You see"—her voice shook slightly and a look of horror flickered in her eyes—"you see there are some things I want to tell her—some advice I'd like to get—before you let John see me, and—why, what's the matter?" She put the breakfast tray upon the tabouret and looked at us in quick concern. "Mother—there's nothing wrong, is there? She's not ill? Oh——"

"My child," de Grandin answered softly, "your dear mother never will again be ill. You shall see her, certainly; but not until God's great tomorrow dawns. She is——"

"Not—not *dead?*" the word was formed, rather than spoken, by the girl's pale lips.

The little Frenchman nodded slowly.

"When? How?"

"The night you—you went away, *ma pauvre*. It was murder."

"Murder?" slowly, unbelievingly, she repeated. "But that *can't* be! Who'd want to murder my poor mother?"

De Grandin's voice was level, almost toneless. "The same unconscionable knaves who stole you from the marriage altar," he returned. "They either feared she knew too much of family history—knew something of the origin of David Hume—or else they wished all earthly ties you had with home and kindred to be severed. At any rate, they killed her. They did it subtly, in such manner that it was thought suicide; but it was murder, none the less."

"O-oh!" The girl's faint moan was pitiful, hopeless. "Then I'm all alone; all, all alone—I've no one in the world to——"

"You have your *fiancé*, the good young Monsieur Jean," the Frenchman told her softly. "You also have Friend Trowbridge, as good and staunch a friend as ever was; then there is Jules de Grandin. We shall not fail you in your need, my small one."

For a moment she regarded us distractedly, then suddenly put forth her hands, one to Jules de Grandin, one to me. "Oh, good, kind friends," she whis-

pered, "please help me, if you can. God knows I am in need of help, if ever woman was, for I'm as foul a murderess as ever suffered death; I was accessory to those little children's murders—I was—oh—what was it that the lepers used to cry? 'Unclean'? Oh, God, I am unclean, unclean—not fit to breathe the air with decent men! Not fit to marry John! How could *I* bring children into the world? I who have been accessory to the murder of those little innocents?" She clenched her little hands to fists and beat them on her breast, her tear-filled eyes turned upward as though petitioning pardon for unpardonable sin. "Unclean, unclean!" she wailed. Her breath came slowly, like that of a dumb animal which resents the senseless persistency of pain.

"What is it that you say? A murderess—*you?*" de Grandin shot back shortly.

"Yes—*I*. I lay there on their altar while they brought those little boys and cut their—oh, I didn't want to do it; I didn't want them to be killed; but I lay there just the same and let them do it—I never raised a finger to prevent it!"

De Grandin took a deep breath. "You are mistaken, *Mademoiselle,*" he answered softly. "You were in a drugged condition; the victim of a vicious Oriental drug. In that all-helpless state one sees visions, unpleasant visions, like the figments of a naughty dream. There were no little boys; no murders were committed while you lay thus upon the Devil's altar. It was a seeming, an illusion, staged for the edification of those wicked men and women who made their prayer to Satan. In the olden days, when such things were, they sacrificed small boys upon the altar of the Devil, but this is now; even those who are far gone in sin would halt at such abominations. They were but waxen simulacra, mute, senseless reproductions of small boys, and though they went through all the horrid rite of murder, they let no blood, they did perform no killings. No; certainly not." Jules de Grandin, physician, soldier and policeman, was lying like the gallant gentleman he was, and lying most convincingly.

"But I heard their screams—I heard them call for help, then strangle in their blood!" the girl protested.

"All an illusion, *ma chère,*" the little Frenchman answered. "It was a ventriloquial trick. At the conclusion of the ceremony the good Trowbridge and I would have sworn we heard a terrible, thick voice conversing with the priest upon the altar; that also was a juggler's trick, intended to impress the congregation. *Non, ma chère,* your conscience need not trouble you at all; you are no accessory to a murder. As to the rest, it was no fault of yours: you were their prisoner and the helpless slave of wicked drugs; what you did was done with the body, not the soul. There is no reason why you should not wed, I tell you."

She looked at him with tear-dimmed eyes. Though she had mastered her first excess of emotion, her slender fingers clasped and unclasped nervously and she returned his steady gaze with something of the vague, half-believing apprehension of a child. "You're sure?" she asked.

"Sure?" he echoed. "To be sure I am sure, *Mademoiselle*. Remember, if you please, I am Jules de Grandin; I do not make mistakes.

"Come, calm yourself. Monsieur Jean will be here at any moment; then——"

He broke off, closing his eyes and standing in complete silence. Then he put his fingers to his pursed lips and from them plucked a kiss and tossed it upward toward the ceiling. *"Mon Dieu,"* he mur-

mured rapturously, *"la passion délicieuse,* is it not magnificent?"

"ALICE! Alice, beloved——" Young Davisson's voice faltered as he rushed into the room and took the girl into his arms. "When they told me that they'd found you at last, I could hardly believe—I knew they were doing everything, but——" Again his speech halted for very pressure of emotion.

"Oh, my dear!" Alice took his face between her palms and looked into his worshipping eyes. "My dear, you've come to me again, but——" She turned from him, and fresh, hot tears lay upon her lashes.

"No buts, *Mademoiselle!"* de Grandin almost shouted. "Remember what I said. Take Love when he comes to you, my little friends; oh, do not make excuses to turn him out of doors—hell waits for those who do so! There is no obstacle to your union, believe me when I say so. Take my advice and have the good *curé* come here this very day, I beg you!"

Both Davisson and Alice looked at him amazed, for he was fairly shaking with emotion. He waved a hand impatiently. "Do not look so, make no account of doubts or fears or feelings of unworthiness!" he almost raged. "Behold me, if you please; an empty shell, a soulless shadow of a man, a being with no aim in life, no home nor fireside to bid him welcome when he has returned from duty! Is that the way to live? *Mille fois non,* I shall say not; but——

"I let Love pass me by, my friends, and have regretted it but once, and that once all my aimless, empty life. *Ecoutez-moi!* In the springtime of our youth we met, sweet Héloïse and I, beside the River Loire. I was a student at the Sorbonne, my military service yet to come; she—*ther Dieu,* she was an angel out of Paradise!

"Beside the silver stream we played together; we lay beneath the poplar trees; we rowed upon the river; we waded barefoot in the shallows. Yes, and when we finished wading she plucked cherries, red, ripe cherries from the trees, and twined their stems about her toes, and gave me her white feet to kiss. I ate the cherries from her feet and kissed her toes, one kiss for every cherry, one cherry for each kiss. And when we said *bonne nuit—mon Dieu,* to kiss and cling and shudder in such ecstasy once more!

"Alas, my several times great grandsire, he whose honored name I bore, had cut and hacked his way through raging Paris on the night of August 24 in 1572—how long his bones have turned to ashes in the family tomb!—while her ancestors had worn the white brassard and cross, crying *'Messe ou mort! À bas les Huguenots!'* "

He paused a moment and raised his shoulders in a shrug of resignation. "It might not be," he ended sadly. "Her father would have none of me; my family forbade the thought of marriage. I might have joined her in her faith, but I was filled with scientific nonsense which derided old beliefs; she might have left the teachings of her forebears and accepted my ideas, but twenty generations of belief weigh heavily upon the shoulders of a single fragile girl. To save my soul she forfeited all claim upon my body; if she might not have me for husband she'd have no mortal man, so she professed religion. She joined the silent Carmelites, the Carmelites who never speak except in prayer, and the last fond word I had from her was that she would pray ceaselessly for my salvation.

"Hélas, those little feet so much adored—how many weary steps of needless penance have they taken since that day so long ago! How fruitless life has been to

me since my own stubbornness closed the door on happiness! Oh, do not wait, my friends! Take the Love the good God gives, and hold it tight against your hearts —it will not come a second time!

"Come, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded me, "let use leave them in their happiness. What have we, who clasped Love's hand in ours long years ago, and saw the purple shadow of his smile grow black with dull futility, to do with them? Nothing, *pardieu!* Come, let us take a drink."

We poured the ruby brandy into wide-mouthed goblets, for de Grandin liked to scent its rich bouquet before he drank. I studied him covertly as he raised his glass. Somehow, the confession he had made seemed strangely pitiful. I'd known him for five years, nearly always gay, always nonchalant, boastfully self-confident, quick, brave and reckless, ever a favorite with women, always studiously gallant, but ever holding himself aloof, though more than one fair charmer had deliberately paid court to him. At last I understood—or thought I did. Jules de Grandin was rather too complex to admit of easy understanding.

"To you, my friend," he pledged me. "To you, and friendship, and brave deeds of adventure, and last of all to Death, the last sweet friend who flings the door back from our prison, for——"

The clamoring telephone cut short his toast.

"Mercy Hospital," a crisp feminine voice announced as I picked up the instrument. "Will you and Doctor de Grandin come at once? Detective Sergeant Costello wants to see you just as soon as—oh, wait a minute, they've plugged a 'phone through from his room."

"Hullo, Doctor Trowbridge, sor," Costello's salutation came across the wire a moment later. "They like to got me, sor —in broad daylight, too."

"Eh? What the deuce?" I shot back. "What's the trouble, Sergeant?"

"A chopper, sor."

"A *what?*"

"Machine-gun, sor. Hornsby an' me wuz standin' be th' corner o' Thirty-fourth an' Tunlaw Streets half an hour back, when a car comes past like th' hammers o' hell, an' they let us have a dose o' bullets as they passed. Pore Hornsby got 'is first off—went down full o' lead as a Christmas puddin' is o' plums, sor—but I'm just messed up a little. Nawthin' but a bad ar-rm an' a punctured back, praise th' Lord!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Have you any idea who——"

"I have that, sor; I seen 'im plain as I see you—as I would be seein' ye if ye wuz here, I mean, sor, an'——"

"Yes?" I urged as he paused a moment and a swallow sounded audibly across the wire.

"Yes, sor. I seen 'im, an' there's no mistake about it. It were th' felly you an' Doctor de Grandin turned over to me to hold fer murther last night. I seen 'im plain as day; there's no mistakin' that there map o' hisn."

"Good Lord, then he did escape!"

"No, sir; he didn't. He's locked up tight in his cell at headquarters this minute, waitin' arraignment fer murther!"

19. The Lightning-Bolts of Justice

THAT evening Alice suffered from severe headaches and shortly afterward with sharp abdominal pains. Though a careful examination disclosed neither enlarged tonsils nor any evidence of mechanical stoppage, the sensation of a ball rising in her throat plagued her almost ceaselessly; when she attempted to cross the room her knees buckled under her as though they had been the boneless joints of a rag-doll.

Jules de Grandin pursed his lips, shook his head and tweaked the needle-ends of his mustache disconsolately. *"L'hystérie,"* he murmured. "It might have been foreseen. The emotional and moral shock the poor one has been through is enough to shatter any nerves. *Hélas,* I fear the wedding may not be so soon, Friend Trowbridge. The experience of marriage is a trying one to any woman—the readjustment of her mode of life, the blending of her personality with another's—it is a strain. No, she is in no condition to essay it."

Amazingly, he brightened, his small eyes gleaming as with sudden inspiration. *"Parbleu,* I have it!" he exclaimed. "She, Monsieur Jean and you, *mon vieux,* shall take a trip. I would suggest the Riviera, were it not that I desire isolation for you all until—no matter. Your practise is not so pressing that it can not be assumed by your estimable colleague, Doctor Phillips; and Mademoiselle Alice will most certainly improve more quickly if you accompany her as personal physician. You will go? Say that you will, my friend; a very great much depends on it!"

Reluctantly, I consented, and for six weeks Alice, John Davisson and I toured the Caribbean, saw devastated Martinique, the birthplace of the Empress Josephine, drank Haitian coffee fresh from the plantation, investigated the sights and sounds and, most especially, the smells of Panama and Colon, finally passed some time at the Jockey Club and Sloppy Joe's in Habana. It was a well and sun-tanned Alice who debarked with us and caught the noon train out of Hoboken.

Arrangements for the wedding were perfected while we cruised beneath the Southern Cross. The old Hume house would be done over and serve the bride and groom for home, and in view of Alice's bereavement the formal ceremony had been canceled, a simple service in the chapel of St. Chrysostom's being substituted. Pending the nuptials Alice took up residence at the Hotel Carteret, declaring that she could not think of lodging at my house, warm as was my invitation.

"ALL has been finished," de Grandin told me jubilantly as he, Renouard and Ingraham accompanied me from the station. "The justice of New Jersey, of which you speak so proudly; she has more than justified herself. Oh, yes."

"Eh?" I demanded.

Renouard and Ingraham chuckled.

"They gave it to him," the Englishman explained.

"In the throat—the neck, I should remark," Renouard supplied, wrestling bravely with the idiom.

"The party will be held tomorrow night," de Grandin finished.

"Who—what—whatever are you fellows saying?" I queried. "What party d'ye mean, and——"

"Grigor Bazarov," de Grandin answered with another laugh, "the youthful-bodied one with the aged, evil face; the wicked one who celebrated the Black Mass. He is to die tomorrow night. Yes, *parbleu,* he dies for murder!"

"But——"

"Patience, *mon vieux,* and I shall tell you all. You do recall how we—Monsieur Hiji, Renouard and I—did apprehend him on the night we rescued Mademoiselle Alice? Of course. Very well.

"You know how we conspired that he should be tried for a murder which he did not perpetrate, because we could not charge him with his many other crimes? Very good. So it was.

"When we had packed you off with Monsieur Jean and his so charming fiancée, your testimony could not serve to save him. No, we had the game all to

ourselves, and how nobly we did swear his life away! *Mordieu,* when they heard how artistically we committed perjury, I damn think Ananias and Sapphira hung their heads and curled up like two anchovies for very jealousy! The jury almost wept when we described his shameful crime. It took them only twenty minutes to decide his fate. And so tomorrow night he gives his life in expiation for those little boys he sacrificed upon the Devil's altar and for the dreadful death he brought upon poor Abigail.

"Me, I am clever, my friend. I have drawn upon the wires of political influence, and we shall all have seats within the death house when he goes to meet the lightning-bolt of Jersey justice. Yes, certainly; of course."

"You mean we're to witness the execution?"

"*Mais oui; et puis.* Did I not swear he should pay through the nose when he slew that little helpless lad upon the Devil's altar? But certainly. And now, by damn, he shall learn that Jules de Grandin does not swear untruly—unless he wishes to. Unquestionably."

DEFTLY, like men accustomed to their task, the state policemen patted all our pockets. The pistols my companions wore were passed unquestioned, for only cameras were taboo within the execution chamber.

"All right, you can go in," the sergeant told us when the troopers had completed their examination, and we filed down a dimly lighted corridor behind the prison guard.

The death room was as bright as any clinic's surgery, immaculate white tile reflecting brilliant incandescent bulbs' hard rays. Behind a barricade of white-enameled wood on benches which reminded me of pews, sat several young men whose journalistic calling was engraved indelibly upon their faces, and despite their efforts to appear at ease it took no second glance to see their nerves were taut to the snapping-point; for even seasoned journalists react to death—and here was death, stark and grim as anything to be found in dissecting-rooms.

"The chair," a heavy piece of oaken furniture, stood near the farther wall, raised one low step above the tiled floor of the chamber, a brilliant light suspended from the ceiling just above it, casting its pitiless spotlight upon the center of the tragic stage. The warden and a doctor, stethoscope swung round his neck as though it were a badge of office, stood near the chair, conversing in low tones; the lank cadaverous electrician whose duty was to send the lethal current through the condemned man's body, stood in a tiny alcove like a doorless telephone booth slightly behind and to the left of the chair. A screen obscured a doorway leading from the room, but as we took our seats in front I caught a fleeting glimpse of a white-enameled wheeled bier, a white sheet lying neatly folded on it. Beyond, I knew, the surgeon and the autopsy table were in readiness when the prison doctor had announced his verdict.

The big young Englishman went pale beneath his tropic tan as he surveyed the place; Renouard's square jaw set suddenly beneath his bristling square-cut beard; de Grandin's small, bright eyes roved quickly round the room, taking stock of the few articles of furniture; then, involuntarily, his hand flew upward to tease the tightly waxed hairs of his mustache to a sharper point. These three, veterans of police routine, all more than once participants in executions, were fidgeting beneath the strain of waiting. As for me—if I came through without the aid of smelling-salts, I felt I should be lucky.

A light tap sounded on the varnished

door communicating with the death cells. A soft, half-timid sort of tap it was, such as that a person unaccustomed to commercial life might give before attempting to enter an office.

The tap was not repeated. Silently, on well-oiled hinges, the door swung back, and a quartet halted on the threshold. To right and left were prison guards; between them stood the Red Priest arrayed in open shirt and loose black trousers, list slippers on his feet. As he came to a halt I saw that the right leg of the trousers had been slit up to the knee and flapped grotesquely round his ankle. The guards beside him held his elbows lightly, and another guard brought up the rear.

Pale, calm, erect, the condemned man betrayed no agitation, save by a sudden violent quivering of the eyelids, this, perhaps, being due to the sudden flood of light in which he found himself. His great, sad eyes roved quickly round the room, not timorously, but curiously, finally coming to rest upon de Grandin. Then for an instant a flash showed in them, a lambent flash which died as quickly as it came.

Quickly the short march to the chair began. Abreast of us, the prisoner wrenched from his escorts, cleared the space between de Grandin and himself in one long leap, bent forward and spat into the little Frenchman's face.

Without a word or cry of protest the prison guards leaped on him, pinioned his elbows to his sides and rushed him at a staggering run across the short space to the chair.

De Grandin drew a linen kerchief from his cuff and calmly wiped the spittle from his cheek. *"Eh bien,"* he murmured, "it seems the snake can spit, though justice has withdrawn his fangs, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

The prison warders knew their work. Straps were buckled round the prisoner's wrists, his ankles, waist. A leather helmet like a football player's was clamped upon his head, almost totally obscuring his pale, deep-wrinkled face.

There was no clergyman attending. Grigor Bazarov was faithful to his compact with the Devil, even unto death. His pale lips moved: "God is folly and cowardice. God is tyranny and misery. God is evil. To me, then, Lucifer!" he murmured in a singsong chant.

The prison doctor stood before the chair, notebook in hand, pencil poised. The prisoner was breathing quickly, his shoulders fluttering with forced respiration. A deep, inhaling gulp, a quick, exhaling gasp—the shoulders slanted forward.

So did the doctor's pencil, as though he wrote. The thin-faced executioner, his quiet eyes upon the doctor's hands, reached upward. There was a crunching of levers, a sudden whir, a whine, and the criminal's body started forward, lurching upward as though he sought to rise and burst from the restraining straps. As much as we could see of his pale face grew crimson, like the face of one who holds his breath too long. The bony, claw-like hands were taut upon the chair arms, like those of a patient in the dentist's chair when the drill bites deeply.

A long, eternal moment of this posture, then the sound of grating metal as the switches were withdrawn, and the straining body in the chair sank limply back, as though in muscular reaction to fatigue.

Once more the doctor's pencil tilted forward, again the whirring whine, again the body started up, tense, strained, all but bursting through the broad, strong straps which bound it to the chair. The right hand writhed and turned, thumb and forefinger meeting tip to tip, as though to

take a pinch of snuff. Then absolute flaccidity as the current was shut off.

The prison doctor put his book aside and stepped up to the chair. For something like a minute the main tube of his questing stethoscope explored the reddened chest exposed as he put back the prisoner's open shirt, then:

"I pronounce this man dead."

"Mon Dieu," exclaimed Renouard.

"For God's sake!" Ingraham muttered thickly.

I remained silent as the white-garbed orderlies took the limp form from the chair, wrapped it quickly in a sheet and trundled it away on the wheeled bier to the waiting autopsy table.

"I say," suggested Ingraham shakily, "suppose he ain't quite dead? It didn't seem to me——"

"Tiens, he will be thoroughly defunct when the surgeons' work is done," de Grandin told him calmly. "It was most interesting, was it not?"

His small eyes hardened as he saw the sick look on our faces. "Ah bah, you have the sympathy for him?" he asked almost accusingly. "For why? Were they not more merciful to him than he was to those helpless little boys he killed, those little boys whose throats he slit—or that poor woman whom he crucified? I damn think yes!"

20. *The Wolf-Master*

"*TIENS,* my friends, I damn think there is devilment afoot!" de Grandin told us as we were indulging in a final cup of coffee in the breakfast room some mornings later.

"But no!" Renouard expostulated.

"But yes!" his confrere insisted.

"Read it, my friend," he commanded, passing a folded copy of *The Journal* across the table to me. To Ingraham and Renouard he ordered: "Listen; listen and become astonished!"

MAGNATE'S MENAGERIE ON RAMPAGE

Beasts on Karmany Estate Break Cages and Pursue Intruder—Animals' Disappearance a Mystery.

I read aloud at his request.

"Early this morning keepers at the private zoo maintained by Winthrop Karmany, well known retired Wall Street operator, at his palatial estate near Raritan, were aroused by a disturbance among the animals. Karmany is said to have the finest, as well as what is probably the largest, collection of Siberian white wolves in captivity, and it was among these beasts the disturbance occurred.

"John Noles, 45, and Edgar Black, 30, caretakers on the Karmany estate, hastily left their quarters to ascertain the cause of the noise which they heard coming from the wolves' dens about 3:30 a. m. Rumming through the dark to the dens, they were in time to see what they took to be a man enveloped in a long, dark cloak, running at great speed toward the brick wall surrounding the animals' enclosure. They also noticed several wolves in hot pursuit of the intruder. Both declare that though the wolves had been howling and baying noisily a few minutes before, they ran without so much as a growl as they pursued the mysterious visitor.

"Arriving at the den the men were amazed to find the cage doors swinging open, their heavy locks evidently forced with a crowbar, and all but three of the savage animals at large.

"The strange intruder, with the wolves in close pursuit, was seen by Noles and Black to vault the surrounding wall, but all had disappeared in the darkness when the keepers reached the barrier. Citizens in the vicinity of the Karmany estate are warned to be on the lookout for the beasts, for though they had been in confinement several years and consequently have lost much of their native savagery, it is feared that unless they are speedily recaptured or voluntarily find their way back to their dens, they may revert to their original ferocity when they become hungry. Livestock may suffer from their depredations, and if they keep together and hunt in a pack even human beings are in danger, for all the beasts are unusually large and would make dangerous antagonists.

"This morning at daylight a posse of farmers, headed by members of the state constabulary, was combing the woods and fields in search of the missing animals, but though every spot where wolves might be likely to congregate was visited, no trace of them was found. No one can be found who admits seeing any sign of the runaway wolves, nor have any losses of domestic animals been reported to the authorities.

"The manner in which the wolf pack seems to have vanished completely, as well as the identity of the man in black seen by the two keepers, and the reason which may have actuated him in visiting the Karmany menagerie are puzzling both the keepers and authorities. It has been intimated that the breaking of the cages may have been the vagary of a disordered mind. Certain insane persons have an almost uncontrollable aversion to the sight of caged animals, and it is suggested an escaped lunatic may have blundered into the Karmany zoo as he fled from confinement. If this is so it is quite

possible that, seeing the confined beasts, he was suddenly seized with an insane desire to liberate them, and consequently forced the locks of their cages. The released animals seem to have been ungrateful, however, for both Noles and Black declare the mysterious man was obviously running for his life while the wolves pursued him in silent and ferocious determination. However, since no trace of the body has been found, nor any report of a man badly mauled by wolves made in the locality, it is supposed the unidentified man managed to escape. Meanwhile, the whereabouts of the wolf pack is causing much concern about the countryside.

"Karmany is at present occupying his southern place at Winter Haven, Fla., and all attempts to reach him have been unsuccessful at the time this issue goes to press."

"H'm; it's possible," I murmured as I put the paper down.

"Absolutely," Ingraham agreed.

"Of course; certainly," Renouard concurred.

"Undoubtlessly," de Grandin nodded, then, abruptly:

"What is?"

"Why—er—a lunatic *might* have done it," I returned. "Cases of zoöphilia——"

"And of zoöfiddlesticks!" the little Frenchman interrupted. "This was no insanatic's vagary, my friends; this business was well planned beforehand, though why it should be so we can not say. Still——"

"I DON'T care if he is at breakfast, I've got to see him!" a hysterically shrill voice came stridently from the hallway, and John Davisson strode into the breakfast room, pushing the protesting Nora McGinnis from his path. "Doctor de Grandin—Doctor Trowbridge—*she's gone!*" he sobbed as he half fell across the threshold.

"*Mon Dieu,* so soon?" de Grandin cried. "How was it, *mon pauvre?*"

Davisson stared glassy-eyed from one of us to the other, his face working spasmodically, his hands clenched till it seemed the bones must surely crush.

"He stole her—he and his damned wolves!"

"Wolves? I say!" barked Ingraham.

"*Grand Dieu*—wolves!" Renouard exclaimed.

"*A-a-ah*—wolves? I begin to see the outlines of the scheme," de Grandin answered calmly. "I might have feared as much.

"Begin at the beginning, if you please, *Monsieur,* and tell us everything that happened. Do not leave out an incident, however trivial it may seem; in cases such as this there are no trifles. Begin, commence; we listen."

Young Davisson exhaled a deep, half-sobbing breath and turned his pale face from de Grandin to Renouard, then back again.

"We—Alice and I—went riding this morning as we always do," he answered. "The horses were brought round at half-past six, and we rode out the Albemarle Pike toward Boonesburg. We must have gone about ten miles when we turned off the highway into a dirt road. It's easier on the horses, and the riders, too, you know.

"We'd ridden on a mile or so, through quite a grove of pines, when it began to snow and the wind rose so sharply it cut through our jackets as if they had been summer-weight. I'd just turned round to lead the way to town when I heard Alice scream. She'd ridden fifty feet or so ahead of me, so she was that much behind when we turned.

"I wheeled my horse around, and there, converging on her from both sides of the road, were half a dozen great white wolves!

"I couldn't believe my eyes at first. The brutes were larger than any I'd ever seen, and though they didn't growl or make the slightest sound, I could see their awful purpose in their gleaming eyes and flash-

ing fangs. They hemmed my poor girl in on every side, and as I turned to ride to her, they gathered closer, crouching till their bellies almost touched the ground, and seemed to stop abruptly, frozen, waiting for some signal from the leader of the pack.

"I drove the spurs into my mare and laid the whip on her with all my might, but she balked and shied and reared, and all my urging couldn't force her on a foot.

"Then, apparently from nowhere, two more white beasts came charging through the woods and leaped at my mount's head. The poor brute gave a screaming whinny and bolted.

"I tugged at the bridle and sawed at her mouth, but I might have been a baby for all effect my efforts had. Twice I tried to roll out of the saddle, but she was fairly flying, and try as I would I didn't seem able to disengage myself. We'd reached the Pike and traveled half a mile or so toward town before I finally brought her to a halt.

"Then I turned back, but at the entrance to the lane she balked again, and nothing I could do would make her leave the highway. I dismounted and hurried down the lane on foot, but it was snowing pretty hard by then, and I couldn't even be sure when I'd reached the place where Alice was attacked. At any rate, I couldn't find a trace of her or of her horse."

He paused a moment breathlessly, and de Grandin prompted softly: "And this 'he' to whom you referred when you first came in, *Monsieur?*"

"Grigor Bazarov!" the young man answered, and his features quivered in a nervous tic. "I recognized him instantly!

"As I rushed down that lane at breakneck speed on my ungovernable horse I saw—distinctly, gentlemen—a human figure standing back among the pines. It was Grigor Bazarov, and he stood between the trees, waving his hands like a conductor leading an orchestra. Without a spoken syllable *he was directing that pack of wolves.* He set them after Alice and ordered them to stop when they'd surrounded her. He set them on me, and made them leap at my horse's head without actually fleshing their teeth in her and without attempting to drag me from the saddle—which they could easily have done. Then, when he'd worked his plan and made my mare bolt, he called them back into the woods. It was Alice he was after, and he took her as easily as a shepherd cuts a wether from the flock with trained sheep-dogs!"

"How is this?" de Grandin questioned sharply. "You say it was Grigor Bazarov. How could you tell? You never saw him."

"No, but I've heard you tell of him, and Alice had described him, too. I recognized those great, sad eyes of his, and his mummy-wrinkled face. I tell you——"

"But Bazarov is dead," I interrupted. "We saw him die last week—all of us. They electrocuted him in the penitentiary at Trenton, and——"

"And while he was all safely lodged in jail he broke into this house and all but made away with Mademoiselle Alice," de Grandin cut in sharply. "You saw him with your own two eyes, my Trowbridge. So did Renouard and Monsieur Hiji. Again, while still in jail he murdered the poor Hornsby, and all but killed the good Costello. The evidence is undisputed, and——"

"I know, but he's dead, now!" I insisted.

"There is a way to tell," de Grandin answered. "Come, let us go."

"Go? Where?"

"To the cemetery, of course. I would

look in the grave of this one who can be in jail and in your house at the same time, and kill a gendarme in the street while safely under lock and key. Come, we waste our time, my friends."

We drove to the county court house, and de Grandin was closeted with Recorder Glassford in his chambers a few minutes. *"Très bon,"* he told us as he reappeared. "I have the order for the exhumation. Let us make haste."

THE early morning snow had stopped, but a thin veneer of leaden clouds obscured the sky, and the winter sun shone through them with a pale, half-hearted glow as we wheeled along the highway toward the graveyard. Only people of the poorer class buried their dead in Willow Hills; only funeral directors of the less exclusive sort sold lots or grave-space there. Bazarov's unmarked grave was in the least expensive section of the poverty-stricken burying-ground, one short step higher than the Potter's Field.

The superintendent and two overalled workmen waited at the graveside, for de Grandin had telephoned the cemetery office as soon as he obtained the order for the exhumation. Glancing perfunctorily at the little Frenchman's papers, the superintendent nodded to the Polish laborers. "Git goin'," he commanded tersely, "an' make it snappy."

It was dismal work watching them heave lumps of frosty clay from the grave. The earth was frozen almost stony-hard, and the picks struck on it with a hard, metallic sound. At length, however, the dull, reverberant thud of steel on wood warned us that the task was drawing to a close. A pair of strong web straps were lowered, made fast to the rough box enclosing the casket, and at a word from the superintendent the men strained at the thongs, dragging their weird burden to the surface. A pair of pick-handles were laid across the open grave and the rough box rested on them. Callously, as one who does such duties every day, the superintendent wrenched the box-lid off, and the laborers laid it by the grave. Inside lay the casket, a cheap affair of chestnut covered with shoddy broadcloth, the tinny, imitation-silver nameplate on its lid already showing a dull, brown-blue discoloration.

Snap! The fastenings which secured the casket lid were thrown back; the superintendent lifted the panel and tossed it to the frozen ground.

Head resting on the sateen rayon pillow, hands folded on his breast, Grigor Bazarov lay before us and gave us stare for stare. The mortuarian who attended him had lacked the skill or inclination to do a thorough job, and despite the intense cold of the weather putrefaction had made progress. The dead man's mouth was slightly open, a quarter-inch or so of purple, blood-gorged tongue protruding from his lips as though in low derision; the lids were partly raised from his great eyes, and though these had the sightless glaze of death, it seemed to me some subtle mockery lay in them.

I shuddered at the sight despite myself, but I could not forbear the gibe: "Well, is he dead?" I asked de Grandin.

"Comme un mouton," he answered, in nowise disconcerted.

"Restore him to his bed, if you will be so good, *Monsieur,"* he added to the superintendent, "and should you care to smoke——" A flash of green showed momentarily as a treasury note changed hands, and the cemetery overseer grinned.

"Thanks," he acknowledged. "Next time you want to look at one of 'em, don't forget we're always willing to oblige."

"Yes, he is dead," the Frenchman murmured thoughtfully as we walked slowly

toward the cemetery gate, "dead like a herring, yet——"

"Dead or not," John Davisson broke in, and his words were syncopated by the chattering of his teeth, "dead or not, sir, the man we just saw in that coffin was the man I saw beside the lane this morning. No one could fail to recognize that face!"

21. White Horror

"HERE'S a special delivery letter for Misther Davisson, come whilst yez wuz out, sor," Nora McGinnis announced as we entered the house. "Will ye be afther havin' th' tur-rkey or th' roast fer dinner tonight, an' shall I make th' salad wid tomatoes or asparagus?"

"Turkey, by all means, he is a noble bird," de Grandin answered for me, "and tomatoes with the salad, if you please, *ma petite.*"

The big Irishwoman favored him with an affectionate smile as she retired kitchenward, and young Davisson slit the envelope of the missive she had handed him.

For a moment he perused it with wide-set, unbelieving eyes, then handed it to me, his features quivering once again with nervous tic.

John, Darling:

When you get this I shall be on my way to fulfil the destiny prepared for me from the beginning of the world. Do not seek to follow me, nor think of me, save as you might think kindly of one who died, for I am dead to you. I have forever given up all thought of marriage to you or any man, and I release you from your engagement. Your ring will be delivered to you, and that you may some day put it on the finger of a girl who can return the love you give is the hope of

ALICE.

"I can't—*I won't believe* she means it!" the young man cried. "Why, Alice and I have known each other since we were little kids; we've been in love since she first put her hair up, and——"

"Tiens, my friend," de Grandin interrupted as he gazed at the message, "have you by chance spent some time out in the country?"

"Eh?" answered Davisson, amazed at the irrelevant question.

"Your hearing is quite excellent, I think. Will you not answer me?"

"Why—er—yes, of course, I've been in the country—I spent practically all my summers on a farm when I was a lad, but——"

"Très bon," the little Frenchman laughed. "Consider: Did not you see the wicked Bazarov urge on his wolves to take possession of your sweetheart? But certainly. And did he not forbear to harm you, being satisfied to drive you from the scene while he kidnapped Mademoiselle Alice? Of course. And could he not easily have had his wolf-pack drag you from your horse and slay you? You have said as much yourself. Very well, then; recall your rural recollections, if you will:

"You have observed the farmer as he takes his cattle to the butcher. Does he take the trouble to place his cow in leading strings? By no means. He puts the little, so weak calf, all destined to be veal upon the table in a little while, into a wagon, and drives away to market. And she, the poor, distracted mother-beast, she trots along behind, asking nothing but to keep her little baby-calf in sight. Lead her? *Parbleu,* ropes of iron could not drag her from behind the tumbril in which her offspring rides to execution! Is it not likely so in this case also? I damn think yes.

"This never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized stealer of women holds poor Mademoiselle Alice in his clutch. He spares her *fiancé.* Perhaps he spares him only as the cruel, playful pussy-cat forbears to kill the mouse outright; at any rate, he spares him. For why? *Pardieu,* because by leaving Monsieur Jean free he still allows poor Mademoiselle Alice one little, tiny ray of hope; with such vile subtlety

as only his base wickedness can plan, he holds her back from black despair and suicide that he may force her to his will by threats against the man she loves. *Sacré nom d'un artichaut,* I shall say yes! Certainly, of course."

"You mean—he'll make her go with him—leave me—by threats against my life?" young Davisson faltered.

"*Précisément, mon vieux.* He has no need to drug her now with *scopolamin apomophia;* he holds her in a stronger thrall. Yes, it is entirely likely."

He folded the girl's note between his slim, white hands, regarding it idly for a moment; then, excitedly:

"Tell me, Monsieur Jean, did Mademoiselle Alice, by any chance, know something of telegraphy?"

"Eh? Why, yes. When we were kids we had a craze for it—had wires strung between our houses with senders and receivers at each end, and used to rouse each other at all sorts of hours to tap a message——"

"*Hourra,* the Evil One is circumvented! *Regardez-vous.*"

Holding the letter to the study desk-lamp, he tapped its bottom margin with his finger. Invisible except against the light, a series of light scratches, as though from a pin-point or dry pen, showed on the paper:

—— . . — . ... — — . . — —

"You can read him?" he asked anxiously. "Me, I understand the international, but this is in American Morse, and——"

"Of course I can," young Davisson broke in. " 'Jones' Mill,' it says. Good Lord, why didn't I think of that?"

"Ah? And this mill of Monsieur Jones——"

"Is an old ruin several miles from Boonesburg. No one's occupied it since I can remember, but it can't be more than three miles from the place where we met the wolves, and——"

"*Eh bien,* if that be so, why do we sit here like five sculptured figures on the Arc de Triomphe? Come, let us go at once, my friends. Trowbridge, Renouard, Friend Hiji, and you, Friend Jean, prepare yourselves for service in the cold. Me, I shall telephone the good Costello for the necessary implements.

"*Oui-da, Messieurs les Loups,* I think that we shall give you the party of surprize—we shall feed you that which will make your bellies ache most villainously!"

It was something like a half-hour later when the police car halted at the door. "It's kind o' irreg'lar, sor," Sergeant Costello announced as he lugged several heavy satchels up the steps with the aid of two patrolmen, "but I got permission fer th' loan. Seems like you got a good stand-in down to headquarters."

The valises opened, he drew forth three submachine guns, each with an extra drum of cartridges, and two riot guns, weapons similar to the automatic shotgun, but heavier in construction and firing shells loaded with much heavier shot.

"You and Friend Jean will use the shotguns, Friend Trowbridge, " de Grandin told me. "Renouard, Ingraham and I will handle the quick-firers. Come, prepare yourselves at once. Heavy clothing, but no long coats; we shall need leg-room before the evening ends."

I fished a set of ancient hunting-togs out of my wardrobe—thick trousers of stout corduroy, a pair of high lace boots, a heavy sweater and suéde jerkin, finally a leather cap with folds that buckled underneath the chin. A few minutes' search unearthed another set for Davison, and we joined the others in the hallway. De Grandin was resplendent in a leather aviation suit; Renouard had slipped three sweaters on above his waistcoat and bound

the bottoms of his trousers tight about his ankles with stout linen twine; Ingraham was arrayed in a suit of corduroys which had seen much better days, though not recently.

"Are we prepared?" de Grandin asked. "*Très bon.* Let us go."

The bitter cold of the afternoon had given way to slightly warmer weather, but before we had traversed half a mile the big, full, yellow moon was totally obscured by clouds, and shortly afterward the air was filled with flying snowflakes and tiny, cutting grains of hail which rattled on the windshield and stung like whips when they blew into our faces.

About three-quarters of a mile from the old mill I had to stop my motor, for the road was heavy with new-fallen snow and several ancient trees had blown across the trail, making further progress impossible.

"*Eh bien,* it must be on foot from now on, it seems," de Grandin murmured as he clambered from the car. "Very well; one consents when one must. Let us go; there is no time to lose."

THE road wound on, growing narrower and more uneven with each step. Thick ranks of waving, black-boughed pines marched right to the border of the trail on either side, and through their swaying limbs the storm-wind soughed eerily, while the very air seemed colder with a sharper, harder chill, and the wan and ghastly light which sometimes shines on moonless, snow-filled winter nights, seemed filled with creeping, shifting phantom-shapes which stalked us as a wolf-pack stalks a stag.

"*Morbleu,* I do not like this place, me," Renouard declared. "It has an evil smell."

"I think so, too, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin answered. "Three times already I have all but fired at nothing. My nerves are not so steady as I thought."

"Oh, keep your tails up," Ingraham comforted. "It's creepy as a Scottish funeral here, but I don't see anything——"

"*Ha,* do you say it? Then look yonder, if you will, and tell me what it is you do not see, my friend," de Grandin interrupted.

Loping silently across the snow, themselves a mere shade darker than the fleecy covering of the ground, came a pack of great, white wolves, green-yellow eyes a-glint with savagery, red tongues lolling from their mouths as they drew nearer through the pines, then suddenly deployed like soldiers at command, and, their cordon formed, sank to the snow and sat there motionless.

"*Cher Dieu,*" Renouard said softly. "It is the pack of beasts which made away with Mademoiselle Alice, and——"

A movement stirred within the pack. A brute rose from its haunches, took a tentative step forward, then sank down again, belly to the snow, and lay there panting, its glaring eyes fixed hungrily upon us.

And as the leader moved, so moved the pack. A score of wolves were three feet nearer us, for every member of the deadly circle had advanced in concert with the leader.

I stole a quick glance at de Grandin. His little, round blue eyes were glaring fiercely as those of any of the wolves; beneath his little blond mustache his lips were drawn back savagely, showing his small, white, even teeth in a snarl of hate and fury.

Another rippling movement in the wolf-pack, and now the silence crashed, and from the circle there went up such pandemonium of hellish howls as I had never heard; not even in the worst of nightmares. I had a momentary vision of red mouths and gleaming teeth and shaggy, gray-white fur advancing toward me in a whirlwind rush, then:

"Give fire!" de Grandin shouted.

And now the wolf-pack's savage battle-cry was drowned out by another roar as de Grandin, Ingraham and Renouard, back touching back, turned loose the venom of their submachine guns. Young Davisson and I, too, opened fire with our shotguns, not taking aim, but pumping the mechanisms frenziedly and firing point-blank into the faces of the charging wolves.

How long the battle lasted I have no idea, but I remember that at last I felt de Grandin's hand upon my arm and heard him shouting in my ear: "Cease firing, Friend Trowbridge; there is no longer anything to shoot. *Parbleu,* if wolves have souls, I damn think hell is full with them tonight!"

22. The Crimson Clue

HE TURNED abruptly to Renouard: *"Allez au feu, mon brave,"* he cried, *"pour la patrie!"*

We charged across the intervening patch of snow-filled clearing, and more than once de Grandin or Renouard or Ingraham paused in his stride to spray the windows of the tumbledown old house with a stream of lead. But not a shot replied, nor was there any sign of life as we approached the doorless doorway.

"Easy on," Ingraham counseled. "They may be lyin' doggo, waitin' for a chance——"

"But no," de Grandin interrupted. "Had that been so, they surely would not have missed the chance to shoot us to death a moment ago—we were a perfectly defined target against the snow, and they had the advantage of cover. Still, a milligram of caution is worth a double quintal of remorse; so let us step warily.

"Renouard and I will take the lead. Friend Trowbridge, you and Friend Jean walk behind us and flash your searchlights forward, and well above our heads. That way, if we are ambushed, they will shoot high and give us opportunity to return their fire. Friend Hiji, do you bring up the rear and keep your eyes upon the ground which we have traversed. Should you see aught which looks suspicious, shoot first and make investigation afterward. I do not wish that we should die tonight."

Accordingly, in this close formation, we searched the old house from its musty cellar to its drafty attic, but nowhere was there any hint of life or recent occupancy until, as we forced back the sagging door which barred the entrance to the old grain-bins, we noted the faint, half-tangible aroma of *narcisse noir.*

"Alice!" John Davisson exclaimed. "She's been here—I recognize the scent!"

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured thoughtfully. "Advance your light a trifle nearer, if you please, Friend Trowbridge."

I played the flashlight on the age-bleached casing of the door. There, fresh against the wood's flat surface were three small pits, arranged triangularly. A second group of holes, similarly spaced, were in the hand-hewn planking of the door, exactly opposite those which scarred the jamb.

"Screw-holes," de Grandin commented, "and on the outer side. You were correct, Friend Jean; your nose and heart spoke truly. This place has been the prison of your love—here are the marks where they made fast the lock and hasp to hold her prisoner—but *hélas,* the bird is flown; the cage deserted."

Painstakingly as a paleographer might scan a palimpsest, he searched the little, wood-walled cubicle, flashing his searchlight's darting ray on each square inch of aged planking. *"Ah-ha?"* he asked of no one in particular as the flashlight struck into a corner, revealing several tiny smears of scarlet on the floor.

"Morbleu! Blood?" Renouard exclaimed. "Can it be that——"

De Grandin threw himself full length upon the floor, his little, round blue eyes a scant three inches from the row of crimson stains. "Blood? *Non!"* he answered as he finished his examination. "It is the mark of *pomade pour les levres,* and unless I do mistake——"

"You mean lipstick?" I interrupted. "What in the world——"

"Zut!" he cut me short. "You speak too much, my friend." To Davisson:

"See here, Friend Jean, is not some system of design in this? Is it not——"

"Of course it is!" the young man answered sharply. "It's another telegraphic message, like the one she sent us in the letter. Can't you see? 'Dash, dash; dot, dash; dot, dot, dot; dot, dash; dash, dot——' He read the code through quickly.

De Grandin looked at him with upraised brows. *"Exactement,"* he nodded, "and that means——"

"M-a-c-a-n-d-r-e-w-s s-i-e——" Davisson spelled the message out, then paused, shook his head in puzzlement, and once again essayed the task.

"I can't get any sense from it," he finally confessed. "That's what it spells, no doubt of it, but what the devil——"

"I say, old chap, go over it once more," asked Ingraham. "I may be blotto, but——"

Crash! The thunderous detonation shook the floor beneath us and a heavy beam came hurtling from the ceiling, followed by a cataract of splintered planks and rubble.

Crash! A second fulmination smashed the wooden wall upon our right and a mass of shattered brick and timber poured into the room.

"Bombes d'air!" Renouard cried wildly. "Down—down, my friends; it is the only way to——" His warning ended in a choking grunt as a third explosion ripped the cover off our hiding-place and a blinding pompom of live flame flashed in our eyes.

I felt myself hurled bodily against the farther wall, felt the crushing impact as I struck the mortised planks, and then I felt no more.

"TROWBRIDGE, my friend, my good, brave comrade; do you survive, have you been killed to death? *Mordieu,* say that you live, my old one!" I heard de Grandin's voice calling from immeasurable distance, and slowly realized he held my head upon his shoulder while with frantic hands he rubbed snow on my brow.

"Oh, I'm all right, I guess," I answered weakly, then sank again in comforting oblivion.

When next I struggled back to consciousness, I found myself on my own surgery table, de Grandin busy with a phial of smelling-salts, a glass of aromatic spirit on the table, and a half-filled tumbler of cognac next to it. "Thanks be to God you are yourself once more!" he exclaimed fervently, handed me the water and ammonia and drained the brandy glass himself. *"Pardieu,* my friend, I thought that we should surely lose you!" he continued as he helped me to a chair.

"You had a close squeak, no doubt of it," Ingraham agreed.

"What happened?" I demanded weakly.

De Grandin fairly ground his teeth in rage. "They made a foolishness of us," he told me. "While we were busy with their *sacré* wolves they must have been escaping, and the thunder of our guns drowned out the whirring of their motors. Then, when we were all safe and helpless in the house, they circled back and dropped the hand grenades upon us. Luckily for us they had no aerial torpedoes, or we should now be practising

upon the harp. As it is——" he raised his shoulders in a shrug.

"B—but, you mean they had a *plane?*" I asked, amazed.

"*Ha,* I shall say as much!" he answered. "Nor did they stop to say a 'by-your-leave' when they obtained it. This very night, an hour or so before we journeyed to that thirty-thousand-times-accursed mill of Monsieur Jones, two men descended suddenly upon the hangars at New Bristol. A splendid new amphibian lay in the bay, all ready to be drawn into her shed. The people at the airport are much surprized to see her suddenly take flight, but—aviators are all crazy, else they would remain on land, and who shall say what form their latest madness takes? It was some little time before the truth was learned. Then it was too late.

"Stretched cold upon the runway of the hangar they found the pilot and his mechanician. Both were shot dead, yet not a shot was heard. The miscreants had used silencers upon their guns, no doubt.

"*Tiens,* at any rate, they had not stopped at murder, and they had made off with the plane, had landed it upon the frozen millpond, then sailed away, almost—but not quite, thank God!—leaving us as dead as we had left their guardian wolves."

"*Hélas,* and we shall never overtake them!" Renouard said mournfully. "It is too obvious. They chose the amphibian plane that they might put to sea and be picked up by some ship which waited; and where they may be gone we can not say. There is no way of telling, for——"

"Hold hard, old thing; I think perhaps there is!" the Englishman broke in. "When Trowbridge toppled over it knocked the thought out of my head, but I've an idea we may trace 'em. I'll pop off to the cable office and send a little tracer out. We ought to get some solid information by tomorrow."

We were still at breakfast the next morning when the young man from the cable office came. "Mr. In-gra-ham here?" he asked.

"Don't say it like that, young feller, me lad, it's Ingraham—'In' as in 'inside,' and 'graham' as in biscuit, you know," returned the Englishman with a grin as he held out his hand for the message.

Hastily he read it to himself, then aloud to us:

No strangers seeking access to the bush through here but French report a hundred turned back from Konakri stop unprecedented number of arrivals at Monrovia stop investigation under way

SYMMES
Supt

"*Très bon,*" de Grandin nodded. "Now, if you will have the goodness to translate——" he paused with brows raised interrogatively.

"Nothin' simpler, old thing," the Englishman responded. "You see, it was like this:

" 'Way up in the back country of Sierra Leone, so near the boundary line of French Guinea that the French think it's British territory and the British think it's French, an old goop named MacAndrews got permission to go diggin' some twenty years ago. He was a dour old Scotsman, mad as a dingo dog, they say, but a first-rate archeologist. There were some old Roman ruins near the border, and this Johnny had the idea he'd turn up something never in the books if he kept at it long enough. So he built a *pukka* camp and settled down to clear the jungle off; but fever beat his schedule and they planted the old cove in one of his own trenches.

"That ended old Mac's diggin', but his camp's still there. I passed it less than five years ago, and stopped there overnight. The natives say the old man's ghost hangs around the place, and shun it like the plague—haven't even stolen anything."

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured. "And——"

"Oh, quite, old dear. A big 'and.' That's what got the massive intellect to workin', don't you know. There's a big natural clearin' near MacAndrews' and a pretty fair-sized river. The place is so far inland nobody ever goes there unless he has to, and news—white man's news, I mean—is blessed slow gettin' to the coast. Could anything be sweeter for our Russian friends' jamboree?

"Irak is under British rule today, and any nonsense in that neighborhood would bring the police sniffin' round. The Frenchmen in Arabia don't stand much foolishness, so any convocation of the Devil-Worshippers is vetoed in advance so far as that locality's concerned. But *what about MacAndrews'?* They could plant and harvest the finest crop of merry young hell you ever saw out there and no one be the wiser. But they've got to get there. That's the blighted difficulty, me lad. Look here——"

He drew a pencil and notebook from his pocket and blocked out a rough map: "Here's Sierra Leone; here's French Guinea; here's Liberia. Get it? Our people in Freetown have to be convinced there's some good reason why before they'll pass a stranger to the bush country; so do the French. But Liberia—any man, black, white, yellow or mixed, who lands there with real money in his hand can get unlimited concessions to go hunting in the back country, and no questions asked.

"There you are, old bean. When Davisson decoded that message on the floor last night it hit me like a brick. The gal had told us where she was in the letter; now, she takes a chance we'll go to Jones' Mill and starts to write a message on the floor. They've talked before her, and she takes her lipstick and starts to write her destination down—'MacAndrews, Sierra Leone'—but only gets 'MacAndrews' and the first three letters of 'Sierra' down when they come for her and she has to stop. That's the way I've figured it—it's great to have a brain like mine!

"Now, if they've really picked MacAndrews' old camp for their party, there'll be a gatherin' of the clans out there. And the visitors will have to come overland, or enter through Freetown, one of the French ports or Liberia. That's reasonin', old top.

"So I cabled Freetown to see if any one's been tryin' to bootleg himself through the lines, or if there'd been much sudden immigration through the French ports. You have the answer. All these coves will have to do is strike cross-country through the bush and——"

"And we shall apprehend them!" Renouard exclaimed delightedly.

"Right-o, dear sir and fellow policeman," the Englishman returned. "I'm bookin' passage for West Africa this mornin', and——"

"Book two," Renouard cut in. "This excavation of Monsiur MacAndrews, it is near the border; me, I shall be present with a company of Senegalese gendarmes and——"

"And with me, *pardieu!* Am I to have no pleasure?" broke in Jules de Grandin.

"Me, too," John Davisson asserted. "If they've got Alice, I must be there, too."

"You might as well book passage for five," I finished. "I've been with you so far, and I'd like to see the finish of this business. Besides, I owe 'em something for that bomb they dropped on me last night."

This story rises to a breath-taking climax in the thrilling chapters that bring the tale to an end in next month's issue. Don't miss the superb conclusion of this remarkable story in the July WEIRD TALES, on sale June 1st.

The Ghoul Gallery

By HUGH B. CAVE

The story of an eldritch horror that leaped out of the black night

LET me convince you, first, that the young man who came to my medical offices that night was not the type of man who gives way, without reason, to abject fear.

Yet when I stepped into my outer office and saw him slumped on the divan, I knew that he was in the throes of mortal terror. His face was ghastly white, made hideous by the mop of jet hair that crawled into his eyes. He raised his head sluggishly and glared at me like a trapped animal.

I nodded quietly to the girl who stood beside him. She stepped past me into the inner office, and I drew the door shut silently.

I had known this girl for years. For that matter, all London knew her, as a charming, lovely member of the upper set, a sportswoman, and a distinguished lady of one of England's famous old families. She was Lady Sybil Ravenal.

Tonight, half an hour ago, she had telephoned me, seeking permission to bring a patient—a patient very dear to her—to my suite. Now she stood before me, her hand resting on my arm, and said suddenly:

"You've got to help him, Doctor Briggs! He—he is going mad!"

"Suppose you tell me," I suggested softly, "what he is afraid of."

"I can't, Doctor. There is the family name to consider. He—he is Sir Edward Ramsey."

I started. That name, too, was well known to me and to the rest of London. Sir Edward Ramsey, the favorite playboy of the upper strata, noted sportsman, adventurer. I could not believe that such a man would be sitting in my offices, dragged into the depths of fear.

"You must tell me the cause," I said kindly. "Otherwise I can do nothing."

The girl's lips tightened defiantly.

"When a man comes to you with a broken leg," she said, "you don't ask him where he got it. Please!"

"A fractured leg is a physical malady. His is mental."

"But he comes to you in the same capacity, Doctor. You must help him!"

"I can only give you the usual advice," I shrugged. "Since you refuse to divulge the cause of his terror, I can only suggest that he get away from it."

I could see, from the obvious twist of her mouth, that she was keenly disappointed. She would have argued with me, perhaps pleaded with me, had not the door opened suddenly behind her.

I say "opened." In reality it was flung back savagely. Young Ramsey stood on the threshold, reeling, glowering at me out of smoldering eyes. I did not know, then, what made him intrude at that moment. I thought, foolishly, that he was afraid of being left alone in the dimly lighted outer office.

He staggered forward blindly, groping toward me.

"The thing!" he cried. His voice was high-pitched and nasal. "By God, it's following me! It's—it's——"

"In the space where that gleaming skeleton had hung before, a mad thing leered out at me."

I stared at him in bewilderment. There was no sound in my rooms at that moment—no sound at all except the half-inaudible humming of a machine in the adjoining suite—an electro-therapeutic machine used by my associate in the treatment of leucocythemia and similar afflictions.

Yet the boy's hands clawed at the sleeve of my coat. He flung himself against me muttering a jargon of words that had no seeming intelligence. And then, very suddenly, his twitching face became fixed, staring, glaring at something beyond me. With a strangled sob of abject horror, he stumbled back.

I WAS beside him in an instant, holding his quivering body upright. As I looked at him, his eyes were wide open and rimmed with white, glued in mute terror upon a small table which stood

against the wall on the opposite side of the room.

The table was an insignificant one, placed there merely for ornamental purposes. I had covered it with a black cloth and lined it, along the back, with a small rack of medical volumes. In the center of the black cloth, facing into the room, I had set a human skull.

The thing was neither fantastic nor horrible, merely a very ordinary medical head bleached white. In the shadows, perhaps, the eyeless sockets and grinning mouth, with its usual set of enameled teeth, were a bit unconventional; but certainly there was nothing to excite such uncontrollable horror as gripped the man in my arms.

His eyes were full of sheer madness as he stared at it. His lips had writhed apart and were twitching spasmodically. He clung to me with all his strength; and at length, wrenching his gaze from the thing on the table, he buried his head in my arms and surrendered to the fear which overwhelmed him.

"Be merciful, Briggs!" he moaned. "For God's sake, be merciful! Come with me—stay with me for a day or two, before I go utterly mad!"

There was no alternative. I could not send a man away in such condition. Neither could I keep him with me, for my quarters were not fitted with additional rooms for mad patients.

I forced him into a chair, where he could not see the death's-head on the table. Leaving him with the girl who had brought him, I hurriedly packed a small overnight case and made ready for an all-night siege of it. When I returned, I found the boy slumped wearily in the chair with his head in the girl's comforting arms.

"Come," I said quietly.

He looked up at me. His bloodshot eyes struggled to drag me into focus.

"You—you are coming with me, Briggs?" he asked slowly.

"I am."

He pushed himself heavily out of the chair. As he turned, his hand groped for mine. He spoke with a great effort.

"Thanks, Briggs. I'll—try to get back a little courage."

THAT was my introduction to Sir Edward Ramsey. The account of our departure, and of our subsequent arrival at Sir Edward's huge town house, is of little importance. During the entire journey my two companions did not utter a word. The boy seemed to have shrunk into himself, to have fallen into the lowest depths of fearful anticipation. The girl sat stiff, rigid, staring straight ahead of her.

I remember one thing which struck me as being more or less peculiar, in view of the boy's social position. No servant opened the door to us. For that matter, the boy made no attempt to summon one by ringing the bell. Instead, he groped into his pockets for his own door-key and fumbled nervously with the lock. Turning his head sideways, he spoke to me stiffly:

"My man's—deaf, Briggs. Damned nuisance, but it's the only reason he—stays. The others cleared out long ago."

The door swung open. I followed Sir Edward down the carpeted hall, with the girl beside me. The boy was trembling again, glancing about him furtively. I was forced to take his arm and lead him quietly into one of the massive rooms adjoining the corridor.

There he sank into a chair and stared up at me hopelessly. I realized that he had not slept in many hours—that he was on the verge of breakdown.

Opening my case, I administered an opiate to deaden his nerves, although I had little hope that it would have the

desired effect. The boy's terror was too acute, too intense. However, the drug quieted him; he slept fitfully for the better part of an hour; long enough for Lady Sybil to draw me aside, motion me to a chair, and tell me her story.

She came directly to the point, softly and deliberately. They were in love, she and Ramsey. They were betrothed. Six weeks ago his love had changed to fear.

"At first he fought against it," she said evenly. "Then it took possession of him—of his very soul. He—he released me from my promise."

"Why?"

"Because of the curse that hangs over his family."

"And that is why you came to me tonight?"

"I came, Doctor," she said fervently, "because it was a last hope. I love him. I can not give him up. He lives alone here, except for a single servant who is deaf. I have been with him every day since this influence claimed him. At night, of course, I can not be at his side—and it is the night-time he fears!"

"And the cause of his fear?" I prompted.

"I—I can not tell you."

I knew better than to demand an explanation. Without a word I returned to my patient. He was not sleeping, for when I stood over him his eyes opened and he stared at me wearily. I drew a chair close to him and bent forward.

"I want you to tell me," I said simply, "the entire story. Only under those conditions can I help you. Do you understand?"

"That—is impossible."

"It's necessary."

"I—can't do it, Briggs."

"In that case," I shrugged, getting to my feet, "I shall take you away from here. At once!"

"No, no, Briggs! You—you can't! The thing will—follow me. It trailed me to your offices. It——"

It was the girl who cut him short. She stepped closer and took his hands firmly, and looked straight at me.

"He is under oath to say nothing, Doctor," she said evenly.

"Under oath? To whom?"

"His father, Sir Guy."

"Then, of course, I shall see Sir Guy at once——"

"He is—dead."

I stood silent, glancing from one to the other. Suddenly the girl straightened up and stood erect, her eyes blazing.

"But *I* am not under oath!" she cried, almost savagely. "I will tell you——"

"By God, no!" The boy groped up, his face livid.

I understood, then, the courage in Lady Sybil's heart. Slim, lovely as she was, she turned on him fiercely, forcing him back into the chair.

"I am going to tell him," she said bitterly. "Do you hear? The oath does not bind me. I am going to tell Doctor Briggs all I know. It is the only way to help you."

Then, without releasing him, she turned her head toward me.

"This house, Doctor," she said, "is very old and full of musty rooms and corridors. It is made hideous by a terrifying sound that comes, always at night, from the upper galleries. The sound is inexplicable. It is a horrible note which begins with an almost inaudible moan, like the humming of an electric motor. Then it increases in volume to the pitch of a singsong voice, rising and falling tremulously. Finally it becomes a screaming wail, like a human soul in utter torment."

She waited for my questions. I said nothing. The boy had ceased his squirming and sat like a dead man, glaring at me out of lifeless eyes.

"The galleries have been examined many times," Lady Sybil said quietly. "Nothing has ever been discovered to provide an explanation. Four times in the past year the upper recesses of the house have been wired for electric lights; but the lights in that portion of the house never work. No one knows why."

"And that—that is all?" I murmured.

"I think that is all. Except—the history of the House of Ramsey. You will find that in the library, Doctor. I will remain here with Edward."

I hesitated. I did not think it vital, at that moment, to go rummaging through the library in pursuit of ancient lore. But Lady Sybil looked quietly at me and said, in an even voice:

"The library is at the end of the main corridor, Doctor. You will find the necessary books in section twelve."

I did not argue. There was no denying that cool, methodical tone! Before I left the room, however, I examined my patient carefully, to be sure that I was justified in leaving him. He had sunk into complete apathy. His eyes remained wide open, as if he feared to close them. But the opiate had produced an effect of semi-torpor, and I knew that he would not soon become violent again. Thus I turned away and paced silently to the door.

By a singular coincidence the door opened as I reached it. On the threshold I came face to face with the servant, a ferret-faced fellow with deep-set, colorless eyes, who peered at me suspiciously as I went past him into the corridor.

In this manner, after prowling down the dimly illuminated passage, I came to the library, and sought the particular section which the girl had suggested. Section twelve proved to be not in the main library, but in a secluded recess leading into the very farthest corner. The walls before me were lined with long shelves of books, symmetrically arranged. An ancient claw-footed desk stood in the center, and upon it a gargoyle reading-lamp which I promptly turned on.

The alcove had obviously been unused for some time. A layer of dust hung over it like a funeral shroud. Its musty volumes were sealed with a film of dirt, except—and this is what led me forward eagerly—for a certain shelf which lay almost directly beneath the lamp. The books on this particular shelf had been recently removed, and had been thrown back carelessly.

I took one of the volumes to the desk and bent over it. It contained, in some detail, a history of the house in which I stood, and a lengthy description of its occupants since time immemorial. Allow me to quote from it:

"Sir Guy Ramsey. 1858-1903." [Evidently the father of my patient.] "Eton and Cambridge." [Here followed an account of an adventurous and courageous life.] "In the year 1903, Sir Guy was suddenly stricken with an inexplicable fear of darkness. Despite all efforts to discover the reason of his terror, no cause was revealed, and Sir Guy refused to divulge any. In September of the same year, Sir Guy became utterly mad with fear and spoke continually of a certain 'specter' which had taken possession of him. Physicians were unable to effect a cure, and on the ninth day of the month of September, Sir Guy was found in the upper galleries, where he had, to all appearances, been strangled to death.

"His own hands clutched his throat; but upon his hands were certain marks and bruises which revealed the imprint of another set of fingers. In these imprints, the thumb of the unknown murderer's left hand was singularly missing. No clue has ever been discovered as to the identity of the assailant."

I closed the book slowly. Mechanically I opened a second of those significant volumes, which proved to be an account of the life and death of another of Sir Edward's forebears. From the dates, I judged the gentleman to be Sir Edward's grandfather—the father of the man whose fate I had just learned. His name, peculiarly, was also Sir Edward.

"On the twenty-seventh day of January, in the year 1881, Sir Edward was suddenly noticed to be prowling fearfully in the upper galleries. From that time on he was observed to be very much in the throes of acute terror; but when accused of this, Sir Edward refused to confide the nature of his fear. On February first he was found choked to death in the upper galleries, his own hands twisted into his throat and the imprint of another set of hands, with the thumb of the left hand missing, still evident on his dead wrists.

"The murderer was not discovered. For three years after Sir Edward's death, the galleries were closed and sealed, after a careful inspection by the police. At the end of that period they were again opened by command of Sir Guy, son of the deceased."

And there was one other passage—a paragraph or two describing the sudden death of some distinguished lady far back in the archives. Her name, according to the book before me, was Lady Carolyn.

"A woman" [the script said] "imbued with the same fearless courage which marked the men of her blood. In the final days of her life she lived alone in the London house. She left a single parting message, found after her death: 'I am becoming insane. The specter has ebbed my last bit of resistance. Madness is, after all, a fitting death—much better than eternal fear and horror.'

"This note was found on the morning of July third, 1792. Lady Carolyn was murdered, strangled to death by unknown hands, on the night the note was written. Her unfortunate body was discovered in the galleries, her fingers still clutching her dead throat, and the marks of other fingers, with the thumb of the left hand missing, imprinted on the back of her hands and wrists. For three years following her death, every effort was expended to locate the fiend who had so brutally destroyed her. The attempt was without avail."

I make no effort to explain these quotations. They are significant in themselves. As for the specter, I could find no further mention of it. Page after page I turned, hoping to discover some clue which might lead to a solution. I found nothing.

I did, however, chance upon something of unusual interest, in the oldest of the heavy volumes. It was an account of a very ancient feud. The names mentioned were those of Sir Godfrey Ramsey (the date was in the century before the French Revolution) and Sir Richard Ravenal. The account gave mention of several brutal killings and disappearances, the majority of these executed by the House of Ravenal. The cause of the feud was not divulged.

The hatred between the two families, however, had come to an end with the death of Sir Richard Ravenal, who was, to quote the withered page before me, "an artist of unusual genius. In the year previous to his death, having formed a truce with the House of Ramsey, he did present to Sir Godfrey Ramsey one or two paintings of great value, executed by himself, as a token of eternal friendship. These paintings have been carefully preserved."

I sought faithfully for an account of the life of this same Sir Godfrey. Eventually I found it, and read the following:

"Twelve years after the Houses of Ramsey and Ravenal had formed the pact

of peace, Sir Godfrey was suddenly stricken with an incomprehensible terror which led to complete madness. He did call his son, Sir James, to him and say the following words: 'A curse has descended upon the House of Ramsey. It is a curse of horror, of torment. It is intended to make gibbering idiots of the men who bear the honored name of Ramsey. For this reason I command you to an oath of silence. The curse has taken possession of me, and I shall die. When you are of age, you, too, will be stricken by the specter. Swear to me that you will not reveal the nature of the curse, lest your sons and their sons after them live in mortal fear.'

"This oath was written into parchment and preserved. On the second day following its execution, Sir Godfrey was found lying in the upper galleries . . ."

I CLOSED the last volume with the uncomfortable feeling of having delved into a maze of horror and death. In the upper reaches of the very house in which I stood, countless members of the House of Ramsey had been hurled into madness and cruelly murdered. Even now, the man who occupied these whispering rooms and huge, empty corridors was being slowly forced under the same hellish influence of insanity. I understood now his reason for silence. He was bound by a family oath which had been passed down from father to son. He *could* not speak!

The influence of that mad room still hung over me as I paced across the library and returned to the room where Sir Edward and Lady Sybil awaited me.

The boy was sleeping. As I entered, Lady Sybil came toward me quietly and stood before me.

"You—have found the books?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Then you know why he is bound to silence, Doctor. He is the last of the Ramseys. I—am the last of—the Ravenals."

I stared at her. I had not suspected any connection between the names in those ancient volumes and the name of the girl before me. Peering into her features now, I felt suddenly as if I had been plunged into an affair of death itself. She—the last of the Ravenals!

"He has never broken the oath," she murmured, "not even to me. I have never remained here at night—never seen the specter. But I have questioned the servants who fled from here, and so I know."

I turned to my patient. He was sleeping peacefully now, and I thanked God that the terror had temporarily left him. Lady Sybil said softly:

"I shall stay here the night, so long as you are here, Doctor. I can not leave him now."

She walked quietly to the divan and made it as comfortable as possible. I did not suggest that she go to one of the sleeping-chambers on the floor above. For my part, I could not consider waking my patient; I would have to sit by him through the night. And I knew that she, too, preferred to be close to him. At any rate, I hadn't the cruelty to suggest that she remain alone, in one of those shadowed, deathly silent rooms on the upper corridor, through the long hours of sinister darkness that confronted us.

I think that she slept very soon after she lay down. When I bent over her a moment later, to drape a silken coverlet over her lovely figure, she did not stir.

I realized then that I was the only person awake in this massive, spectral house. I was alone with the unknown being that patrolled the upper galleries. I closed the door of the room and bolted it. Very quietly I returned to my chair and low-

ered myself. Then I sat there, staring fearfully into the deepening shadows, until I dozed into a fitful slumber.

If the specter of the House of Ramsey crept out of its hidden lair that night, I did not know it. When I awoke, a welcome sunlight was sliding across the floor at my feet, from the opposite window. I was alone in the room. Sir Edward and Lady Sybil had vanished.

I stood up. It was difficult to believe, in this glow of warm sunlight, that anything unusual had occurred during the night.

Evidently nothing had. The door opened behind me and the ferret-faced servant, scuffling forward, said evenly:

"Breakfast is waiting, sir."

I followed him to the dining-hall, and there found my two companions. Lady Sybil rose to greet me with a smile. The boy remained seated. His face was extremely haggard and white. He nodded heavily.

"Thought we'd let you sleep, Briggs," he said. "You earned it."

He did not refer again to the previous night. Lady Sybil, too, maintained a discreet silence. When the meal was over, I called her to me.

"I shall stay here," I said, "until I am sure that his terror does not return. I do not feel justified in leaving the house at the present time."

"You wish me to do something, Doctor?"

I gave her a prescription. In substance, the desired medicine was little more than a tonic, though it contained a slight portion of morphine. It would serve to keep the boy's nerves under control; but I realized even then that the cause of his fear must be removed before any medicine would benefit him.

Lady Sybil, however, promised to have the prescription filled. She had other matters to attend to, she said, and would probably return some time in the late afternoon.

When she had gone, I sought out, once again, those significant volumes that I had found the night before. I studied them for a very long time. It must have been well after two o'clock when Sir Edward came into the library.

He slouched into a chair and remained there, without any display of animation or life. When I got quietly to my feet and replaced the last book on the shelf, he looked at me without emotion.

"Where to, Briggs?" he said dully.

"With your permission," I replied, "I should like to have a look at the galleries."

He nodded. I fancied that the slightest cloud of suspicion crossed his face; but he offered no objections.

I had difficulty in finding my way. The route which led to the upper levels was no easy one to follow, winding as it did through a succession of peculiarly dark and unlighted corridors. Eventually, however, I found myself at the bottom of a circular staircase that coiled upward into the gloom of the floor above. I mounted the steps slowly, holding to the great carved bannister for support; and, having reached the second landing, I followed the twistings of the passage by keeping as close to the wall as possible.

At the end of this circular passage, a curtained window revealed the street below. As I peered down and saw the pavement far below me, I could not repress a shudder.

Cautiously I continued along this corridor to the bottom of a second staircase. Once again, with heavy steps, I groped upward.

And here, at the top of the last incline, I found the upper galleries of the House

of Ramsey. The room lay directly before me. Its massive door, standing half open, revealed a thread of light from some hidden source—a gleam which penetrated like a livid, groping hand into the blackness of the passage.

I entered timidly, leaving the door open behind me. Before me extended a room of enormous size, more like a huge banquet chamber than an art alcove. The illumination was intense, coming as it did from a series of four broad windows set in the farther wall—windows which were uncurtained, and designed to flood the interior with light.

For the rest, the floor was lined with a smooth carpet of dull hue. The walls on opposite sides of me as I moved forward were devoted entirely to framed paintings. The rear wall, which contained the only entrance—through which I had come—was carefully covered with a soft gray drape, cut to outline the wooden panels of the door.

I HAD taken no more than a dozen steps forward into this strange chamber when I came to an abrupt halt. Before me, as I stood motionless, lay evidence that my patient had been here before me—a silk kerchief, embroidered in black with his emblem. I recognized it instantly. He had worn it on the previous evening, tucked in the breast pocket of his jacket. And now it lay here on the carpet, damnable in its significance as I stared down at it. So he had not slept the night through! He had come here—come to this death room, to keep some infernal midnight tryst!

I dropped the thing into my pocket. Having done this, I turned to inspect the magnificent works of art that surrounded me. And then, almost immediately after that first startling episode, came a second shock, a thousand times greater than the first!

The thing glared out at me with horrible malice. It hung before me, leering into my face. I recoiled from it with a sudden intake of breath.

It was a skeleton, painted in dull values of gray and white, with a single blur of jet-black background, created by an artist who possessed a fiendish cunning for horrifying the human eye. Every revolting effect of death was incorporated into that ghastly countenance. And yet, in a medical sense, the thing was far from perfect.

Even as I stared at it, I discerned a dozen very evident faults of construction. Hideous it was, but hideous only because the artist had sacrificed accuracy in order to make it so.

The eye-sockets, executed in a fiendish combination of gray pigments, were horribly empty and staring—but they were too close-set to be natural. The frontal bone, a streak of livid white, was terrible in its effect—but far too broad. The two superior maxillary bones, forming the upper jaw and bounding the glaring, vacant nasal cavity, were hideously formed—but were *separated* on the under surface from the row of broken teeth, in order to lend that maddening grin to the mouth.

There were other defects, easily recognizable. They were less significant. But as a work of horror, the skeleton before me was faultless. Never have I been so completely unnerved by something which I knew could hold no power over me.

I went toward it with irresolute steps, determined to inspect it at close range and then leave the room immediately. The singular glare of its dead features had sapped all my curiosity. I wanted to get away from it.

The painting was very old. Only three colors were evident—white, gray, and that sepulchral black. At the bottom of the heavy gilt frame I found the name of the artist—a name which choked on my

lips as I cried it aloud. That name, faint and almost illegible, was *Ravenal!*

Ravenal! "In the year previous to his death, having formed a truce with the House of Ramsey, he did present to Sir Godfrey Ramsey one or two paintings of great value, executed by himself . . ."

I left the room with an inexplicable sense of fear. Fascination it might have been, for that hideous thing behind me. Horror it might have been, for the slow realization that here—here in this fiendish picture—lay the secret of innumerable murders, and a hellish curse of madness!

THERE is little more to tell. The concluding event of my stay in the House of Ramsey was not long in forthcoming.

The hour was already late when I returned to the library on the lower floor. Sir Edward had not moved from his position. He greeted me with a nod; and the girl, who had returned during my tour of inspection, came toward me to give me the medicine I had ordered.

I forced the boy to take it. Then, in depressing silence, we sat there, the three of us, as the hour grew later and later. Lady Sybil and I made a feeble attempt to play backgammon; but the boy's glassy eyes haunted us. The game was a mockery.

When ten o'clock came, I rose and took the boy's arm.

"A night's sleep," I said sternly, "would be one of your best medicines."

He glanced at me wearily, as if it hurt him to move.

"You are turning in, Briggs?"

"I am."

He sank back into his chair with a half-inaudible murmur. I motioned quietly to Lady Sybil, thinking that if she left him he would be certain to come with us, rather than be left alone. The girl had already prepared a room for herself on the upper floor.

But the boy did not move. As I drew the door shut, he looked up suddenly and spoke in a voice that was strangely harsh.

"Leave it open, Briggs. I'll—go to bed in a while. Closed doors are ghastly—just now."

In the corridor outside, I said goodnight to Lady Sybil and climbed the stairs to my room. The room opened on an unlighted passage—a narrow, gloomy tunnel that twisted from darkness into darkness, revealed only by the glow of light from my own chamber.

The hands of my watch, as I laid the timepiece carefully upon the table, stood at thirty-two minutes after ten o'clock. No sound stirred in the great house. Lady Sybil, having climbed the stairs behind me, had gone to her room at the far end of the corridor. Below stairs, the servant of the penetrating eyes had evidently retired.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later when I heard Sir Edward's step on the stairs. He climbed wearily, inertly. His tread moved along the corridor. I heard the door of his chamber open and close. After that there was nothing but an ominous, depressing, sinister silence.

I left my door open. Most men in my position would, I presume, have closed it and made haste to throw the bolt. But I found comfort, such as it was, in an open exit. I had no desire to be a rat in a trap.

Nervously I switched off the light and sank wearily to the bed. There I lay, facing the half-open door, striving to get rid of my thoughts. And there I lay when, a long time later, I was dimly conscious that the silence had dissolved into sound.

It had no definite beginning, no positive substance. Only in the acute stillness of the capacious structure would it have been audible at all. Even then it was no more than a dead hum, like the drone of muted, smothered machinery.

It increased in volume. For fully sixty seconds, perhaps longer, I lay unmoving, as the sound became a throbbing, wavering reality. I twisted about to stare at the door, as if I expected the vibrations to filter into my room and take the form of some ghastly supernatural being.

Then I heard something more—the distinct tread of human feet advancing quietly along the passage outside! And I saw it—saw the hunched form of Sir Edward Ramsey, creeping slowly along the corridor. Visible for a moment only, he passed the open door of my chamber. An unearthly mask of sepulchral light surrounded him—an obscure, bluish vapor that seemed to rise out of the floor at his feet and hang about him like an ethereal cloak, a Protean winding-sheet. And I shall never forget the fear-haunted glare of the boy's eyes as he moved through the darkness.

He walked as though an inner force guided him forward. His hands hung lifelessly at his sides. His face was tense and ghastly gray, strained to an almost diabolical degree of expectancy. And then, passing out of my range of vision, he vanished.

I sprang from the bed and reached the door in a stride. There I stopped, with both hands clutching the door-frame. The sound of his footsteps had already died; but another form was coming silently out of the darkness and moving past me. The form of Lady Sybil—following him!

I did not hesitate then. I knew, as surely as if the walls themselves were screeching it out to me, that the boy was going to those infernal galleries in the upper recesses of the house. And up there would be that eternal fiend of murder and madness—that unnamed horror which had for centuries preyed on the inhabitants of this ghastly dwelling.

Groping into the passage behind those two grim figures, I fell into the mute procession. Far above me, that dirge of hell had risen to a whimpering moan—a human voice in torment—rising and falling with my steps as I paced forward.

I saw the two figures before me now—the boy still enveloped in that weird mist; the girl silhouetted behind him. His tread was the tread of a man who had repeated this midnight journey many times and knew every creaking board, every turn of the passage, every twist of the long, winding stairways that led into the upper gloom.

He paced on—and on. Behind him crouched the girl, shadowing him as a jungle cat might shadow some unknown, half-dreaded quarry. I saw that evil shroud of unnatural light ascend the stairs, hovering about him—saw it grope down the second labyrinth—saw it climb again, up, up, into the stygian murk. The girl crept after him, and I trailed behind with the utmost caution, lest he should turn and find me behind him.

Only once—before the door of that chamber of abhorrence at the very roof of the house—did he hesitate. Then, swinging the heavy barrier open, he entered.

Through that open doorway, in tripled intensity, came the voice of the House of Ramsey. It beat upon me in waves—a terrific summons, whining hideously, rising and falling with infuriate vehemence. And I knew, in that frantic moment, why Sir Edward had not fled in terror from this place of pestilence. He *could* not. That spectral voice possessed

a spell that would allow no man to leave. It was irresistible in its cunning!

I slunk forward. The girl had already crossed the threshold. As I slipped through the aperture, I saw them directly before me—Lady Sybil pressed flat against the wall; the boy, surrounded by that Protean well of light, standing motionless with both hands uplifted.

The room was a pit of blackness, except for that bluish cone of light. A chill sensation took possession of me. I knew that we were not alone. I felt a malignant, gloating presence, invisible but sentient. All about me emanated that tenuous thread of sound, high-pitched now and wailing in an almost articulate voice. *Human!*

The boy crept forward. He breathed heavily. His body quivered and trembled like a thing disjointed. I knew instinctively what he wanted. It was that grim thing on the farther wall.

Mechanically my eyes turned to stare at it. Then, overcome by what I saw, I fell back.

A wall of darkness faced me. To right, to left, above and below, not a single detail of its construction was visible—except one. There, in the very space where that gleaming skeleton had hung before, a mad thing leered out at me.

It was no dead rack of bones—not now. It was a face—a living, twisted, cruel face, set atop a writhing body. Even as I watched, a mist of phosphorescent light, bluish white, began to emanate from it. The rack of bones became a glowing torso, taking on human form.

Young Ramsey stood glued to the floor before it. Behind me I heard a stifled sob come from the girl's lips. I could not advance—could not move.

Slowly the thing changed contour. Slowly it twisted forward, coiling its sinuous way out of the great gilt frame. It was a skeleton no longer. It had become an undead form, indefinite in shape, swelling and contracting to grotesque mockeries of human mold. I saw a misty outline of ancient clothing hanging from its limbs—a garb that was hundreds of years old in style. And the face, lifted in terrible malice, was the face of an English nobleman.

It burned with a frightful glow, vivid and unnatural. The living dead hands writhed up—up to the thing's own throat, with evil suggestiveness.

And then, as if from a great distance, a strangled screech split the silence of that room of death. The specter's lips curled apart, revealing a double row of broken teeth. Words came through them. Vicious, compelling words.

"To strangle one's self is better than to be mad for eternity! Do you hear, Ramsey? To *strangle one's self*——"

Sir Edward stumbled back, away from it. I saw his hands jerk up to his throat. I saw that fiendish, dead-alive creature lunge toward him.

Then a thin cry rose behind me, from Lady Sybil's lips. I was pushed roughly aside. Sobbing wildly, the girl dashed past me and fell upon the great gilt frame, slashing at it with a knife-like thing which she clutched in her hand. Flat against it, she raked the canvas into ribbons, clawing, ripping at it in sheer madness.

I think it was the sight of her, overcome by the horror of what we had seen, that made me move. I swung about, lurched forward. Against the wall, close to that living monstrosity, reeled Sir Edward. His face was livid with insanity—insanity brought on by the damned thing that grappled with him. His mouth was twisted apart, thick with blood and foam. His body twisted convulsively. And his

hands—his own hands—were clenched in his throat.

That shapeless thing was all about him, hideously malformed. It had no limits, no bounds. It was a mold of bluish mist, with leering face and groping hands. And the hands—God, I can never forget them! They were huge, hairy, black. They were twined about the boy's wrists, forcing the boy's fingers into his own throat. Strangling him! Murdering him! And the thumb of the hairy left hand was missing!

With a mighty jerk I wrenched those fingers from their hold. Behind me the girl was still hacking at the contents of the huge frame, tearing the canvas. The wailing shriek rose to a frenzy—shrilled higher and higher.

Then, all at once, the voice became a sob—a sob of unspeakable anguish, as the girl's knife struck home. It gurgled into silence. The massive shape before me dissolved into a circular, throbbing, writhing wraith of fog, with only hands and face visible. The face lifted upward in agony; the hands clenched on themselves, doubled into knots. Before my eyes the thing became a blurred outline. And then—nothing.

Young Ramsey slid to the floor on hands and knees, in a dead faint. I whirled about, stumbling to Lady Sybil's side.

Neither of us noticed, then, that the room was once more in utter darkness. We were intent upon only one thing. Together we tore at that infernal painting, dragging it out of its frame, raking it to shreds.

The frame fell with a crash, hurtling down upon us. Lady Sybil reeled back with a cry of fear. I held her erect. Together we stood there, staring—staring into something empty and black and sinister.

PRESENTLY I found courage enough to grope for a match and strike it. I blundered forward, only to stop as if an outflung hand had suddenly thrust me back, while the match dropped from my fingers. I must have screamed.

But I was saturated with horror. I was immune to anything more. Grimly I found a second match and, with the yellow glare preceding me, stepped into the aperture revealed by the falling of the picture.

The space was long, thin, hardly more than three feet deep—a silent, ancient vault. There, lying at my feet, extended an oblong box, black and forbidding, with closed cover. A coffin.

I scratched another match, and lifted the cover slowly. Glowering up at me, made livid by the light of the match, lay a skeletonic form, long dead, crumbling in decay.

I stared down at it for an eternity. It was repulsive, even in death. The skull was a grinning mask. The hands were folded on the chest—and the thumb of the left hand was missing.

Beneath those hands lay something else—a rectangular plate of tarnished metal, engraved with minute lettering. I picked it out with nervous fingers.

The legend was hardly visible. I rubbed the metal on the sleeve of my coat, scraping away the film of dust. But the engraving had been scored deep. Holding the match close to it, I made out the words:

Sir Richard Ravenal. Famous artist. Eternal seeker into the secrets of the undead. His body placed here secretly by his son, in accord with a request made before his death. The hatred between Ramsey and Ravenal may never die!

Mechanically I returned the inscription to its resting-place. The girl stood behind me. I stepped past her, out of the vault, and paced across the gallery to where Sir

Edward Ramsey lay motionless on the floor.

Lifting him in my arms, I turned to the door.

"Come," I said to the girl.

She followed me out of the room. In silence we descended the black staircase to the lower levels. There, in the boy's chamber, I lowered Sir Edward to the bed; and, bringing my medicine kit from my own room, I worked over him until he regained consciousness.

The boy stared up at me, reaching out to clutch my hand. He was weak, pathetically weak, but the haunted sheen of terror was gone out of his eyes. I moved away, allowing Lady Sybil to take my place.

Then I left them there—those two who loved each other with a love that was more intense than the most utter terror of this gaunt house.

I groped down the main staircase to the servants' level and roused the ferret-faced deaf man. Together we climbed to the galleries. There we dragged forth that grim coffin with its horrible contents.

Later, in the kitchen of that sinister house, we kindled a great fire. Into it we cast the remains of the shattered picture. Into it we threw the oblong box.

And we stood there side by side, with the scarlet glare of the flames reflected in our faces, until the curse of the House of Ramsey had burned to a handful of dead ashes.

The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqquan

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A fantastic tale of two magnificent emeralds and how they returned to the vampiric entity that owned them

"GIVE, give, O magnanimous and liberal lord of the poor," cried the beggar.

Avoosl Wuthoqquan, the richest and most avaricious money-lender in all Commoriom, and, by that token, in the whole of Hyperborea, was startled from his train of revery by the sharp, eery, cicada-like voice. He eyed the supplicant with acidulous disfavor. His meditations, as he walked homeward that evening, had been splendidly replete with the shining of costly metals, with coins and ingots and gold-work and argentry, and the flaming or sparkling of many-tinted gems in rills and rivers and cascades, all flowing toward the coffers of Avoosl Wuthoqquan. Now the vision had flown; and this untimely and obstreperous voice was imploring him for alms.

"I have nothing for you." His tones were like the grating of a shut clasp.

"Only two *pazoors*, O generous one, and I will prophesy."

Avoosl Wuthoqquan gave the beggar a second glance. He had never seen so disreputable a specimen of the mendicant class in all his wayfarings through Com-

moriom. The man was preposterously old, and his mummy-brown skin, wherever visible, was webbed with wrinkles that were like the heavy weaving of some giant jungle spider. His rags were no less than fabulous; and the beard that hung down and mingled with them was hoary as the moss of a primeval juniper.

"I do not require your prophecies."

"One *pazoor*, then."

"No."

The eyes of the beggar became evil and malignant in their hollow sockets, like the heads of two poisonous little pit-vipers in their holes.

"Then, O Avoosl Wuthoqquan," he hissed, "I will prophesy gratis. Harken to your weird: the godless and exceeding love which you bear to all material things, and your lust therefor, shall lead you on a strange quest and bring you to a doom whereof the stars and the sun will alike be ignorant. The hidden opulence of earth shall allure you and ensnare you; and earth itself shall devour you at the last."

"Begone," said Avoosl Wuthoqquan. "The weird is more than a trifle cryptic in its earlier clauses; and the final clause is somewhat platitudinous. I do not need a beggar to tell me the common fate of mortality."

II

It was many moons later, in that year which became known to pre-glacial historians as the year of the Black Tiger.

Avoosl Wuthoqquan sat in a lower chamber of his house, which was also his place of business. The room was obliquely shafted by the brief, aerial gold of the reddening sunset, which fell through a crystal window, lighting a serpentine line of irised sparks in the jewel-studded lamp that hung from copper chains, and touching to fiery life the tortuous threads of silver and similor in the dark arrases. Avoosl Wuthoqquan, seated in an umber shadow beyond the lane of light, peered with an austere and ironic mien at his client, whose swarthy face and somber mantle were gilded by the passing glory.

The man was a stranger; possibly a travelling merchant from outland realms, the usurer thought—or else an outlander of more dubious occupation. His narrow, slanting, beryl-green eyes, his bluish, unkempt beard, and the uncouth cut of his sad raiment, were sufficient proof of his alienage in Commoriom.

"Three hundred *djals* is a large sum," said the money-lender thoughtfully. "Moreover, I do not know you. What security have you to offer?"

The visitor produced from the bosom of his garment a small bag of tigerskin, tied at the mouth with sinew, and opening the bag with a deft movement, poured on the table before Avoosl Wuthoqquan two uncut emeralds of immense size and flawless purity. They flamed at the heart with a cold and ice-green fire as they caught the slanting sunset; and a greedy spark was kindled in the eyes of the usurer. But he spoke coolly and indifferently.

"It may be that I can loan you one hundred and fifty *djals*. Emeralds are hard to dispose of; and if you should not return to claim the gems and repay me the money, I might have reason to repent my generosity. But I will take the hazard."

"The loan I ask is a mere tithe of their value," protested the stranger. "Give me two hundred and fifty *djals*. . . . There are other money-lenders in Commoriom, I am told."

"Two hundred *djals* is the most I can offer. It is true that the gems are not without value. But you may have stolen them. How am I to know? It is not my habit to ask indiscreet questions."

"Take them," said the stranger, hastily. He accepted the silver coins which Avoosl Wuthoqquan counted out, and offered no further protest. The usurer watched him with a sardonic smile as he departed, and drew his own inferences. He felt sure that the jewels had been stolen, but was in no wise perturbed or disquieted by this fact. No matter whom they had belonged to, or what their history, they would form a welcome and valuable addition to the coffers of Avoosl Wuthoqquan. Even the smaller of the two emeralds would have been absurdly cheap at three hundred *djals;* but the usurer felt no apprehension that the stranger would return to claim them at any time. . . . No, the man was plainly a thief, and had been glad to rid himself of the evidence of his guilt. As to the rightful ownership of the gems —that was hardly a matter to arouse the concern or the curiosity of the moneylender. They were his own property now, by virtue of the sum in silver which had been tacitly regarded by himself and the stranger as a price rather than a mere loan.

The sunset faded swiftly from the room and a brown twilight began to dull the metal broideries of the curtains and the colored eyes of the gems. Avoosl Wuthoqquan lit the fretted lamp; and then, opening a small brazen strong-box, he poured from it a flashing rill of jewels on the table beside the emeralds. There were pale and ice-clear topazes from Mhu Thulan, and gorgeous crystals of tourmalin from Tscho Vulpanomi; there were chill and furtive sapphires of the north, and arctic carnelians like frozen blood, and diamonds that were hearted with white stars. Red, unblinking rubies glared from the coruscating pile, chatoyants shone like the eyes of tigers, garnets and alabraundins gave their somber flames to the lamplight amid the restless hues of opals. Also, there were other emeralds, but none so large and flawless as the two that he had acquired that evening.

AVOOSL WUTHOQQUAN sorted out the gems in gleaming rows and circles, as he had done so many times before; and he set apart all the emeralds with his new acquisitions at one end, like captains leading a file. He was well pleased with his bargain, well satisfied with overflowing caskets. He regarded the jewels with an avaricious love, a miserly complacence; and one might have thought that his eyes were little beads of jasper, set in his leathery face as in the smoky parchment cover of some olden book of doubtful magic. Money and precious gems—these things alone, he thought, were immutable and non-volatile in a world of never-ceasing change and fugacity.

His reflections, at this point, were interrupted by a singular occurrence. Suddenly and without warning—for he had not touched or disturbed them in any manner—the two large emeralds started to roll away from their companions on the smooth, level table of black oggawood; and before the startled moneylender could put out his hand to stop them, they had vanished over the opposite edge and had fallen with a muffled rattling on the carpeted floor.

Such behavior was highly eccentric and peculiar, not to say unaccountable; but the usurer leapt to his feet with no other thought save to retrieve the jewels. He rounded the table in time to see that they had continued their mysterious rolling and were slipping through the outer door, which the stranger in departing had left slightly ajar. This door gave on a courtyard; and the courtyard, in turn, opened on the streets of Commoriom.

Avoosl Wuthoqquan was deeply alarmed, but was concerned by the prospect of losing the emeralds rather than by the eeriness and mystery of their de-

parture. He gave chase with an agility of which few would have believed him capable, and throwing open the door, he saw the fugitive emeralds gliding with an uncanny smoothness and swiftness across the rough, irregular flags of the courtyard. The twilight was deepening to a nocturnal blue; but the jewels seemed to wink derisively with a strange phosphoric luster as he followed them. Clearly visible in the gloom, they passed through the unbarred gate that gave on a principal avenue, and disappeared.

It began to occur to Avoosl Wuthoqquan that the jewels were bewitched; but not even in the face of an unknown sorcery was he willing to relinquish anything for which he had paid the munificent sum of two hundred *djals*. He gained the open street with a running leap, and paused only to make sure of the direction in which his emeralds had gone.

The dim avenue was almost entirely deserted; for the worthy citizens of Commoriom, at that hour, were preoccupied with the consumption of their evening meal. The jewels, gaining momentum, and skimming the ground lightly in their flight, were speeding away on the left toward the less reputable suburbs and the wild, luxuriant jungle beyond. Avoosl Wuthoqquan saw that he must redouble his pursuit if he were to overtake them.

Panting and wheezing valiantly with the unfamiliar exertion, he renewed the chase; but in spite of all his efforts, the jewels ran always at the same distance before him, with a maddening ease and eery volitation, tinkling musically at whiles on the pavement. The frantic and bewildered usurer was soon out of breath; and being compelled to slacken his speed, he feared to lose sight of the eloping gems; but strangely, thereafterward, they ran with a slowness that corresponded to his own, maintaining ever the same interval.

The money-lender grew desperate. The flight of the emeralds was leading him into an outlying quarter of Commoriom where thieves and murderers and beggars dwelt. Here he met a few passers, all of dubious character, who stared in stupefaction at the fleeing stones, but made no effort to stop them. Then the foul tenements among which he ran became smaller, with wider spaces between; and soon there were only sparse huts, where furtive lights gleamed out in the full-grown darkness, beneath the lowering frondage of high palms.

Still plainly visible, and shining with a mocking phosphorescence, the jewels fled before him on the dark road. It seemed to him, however, that he was gaining upon them a little. His flabby limbs and pursy body were faint with fatigue, and he was grievously winded; but he went on in renewed hope, gasping with eager avarice. A full moon, large and amber-tinted, rose beyond the jungle and began to light his way.

COMMORIOM was far behind him now; and there were no more huts on the lonely forest road, nor any other wayfarers. He shivered a little—either with fear or the chill night air; but he did not relax his pursuit. He was closing in on the emeralds, very gradually but surely; and he felt that he would recapture them soon. So engrossed was he in the weird chase, with his eyes on the ever-rolling gems, that he failed to perceive that he was no longer following an open highway. Somehow, somewhere, he had taken a narrow path that wound among monstrous trees whose foliage turned the moonlight to a mesh of quicksilver with heavy, fantastic raddlings of ebony. Crouching in grotesque menace, like giant retiarii, they seemed to close in upon him from all sides. But the money-

lender was oblivious of their shadowy threats, and heeded not the sinister strangeness and solitude of the jungle path, nor the dank odors that lingered beneath the trees like unseen pools.

Nearer and nearer he came to the fleeting gems, till they ran and flickered tantalizingly a little beyond his reach, and seemed to look back at him like two greenish, glowing eyes, filled with allurement and mockery. Then, as he was about to fling himself forward in a last and supreme effort to secure them, they vanished abruptly from view, as if they had been swallowed by the forest shadows that lay like sable pythons athwart the moonlit way.

Baffled and disconcerted, Avoosl Wuthoqquan paused and peered in bewilderment at the place where they had disappeared. He saw that the path ended in a cavern-mouth, yawning blackly and silently before him, and leading to unknown subterranean depths. It was a doubtful and suspicious-looking cavern, fanged with sharp stones and bearded with queer grasses; and Avoosl Wuthoqquan, in his cooler moments, would have hesitated a long while before entering it. But just then he was capable of no other impulse than the fervor of the chase and the prompting of avarice.

The cavern that had swallowed his emeralds in a fashion so nefarious was a steep incline running swiftly down into darkness. It was low and narrow, and slippery with noisome oozings; but the money-lender was heartened as he went on by a glimpse of the glowing jewels, which seemed to float beneath him in the black air, as if to illuminate his way. The incline led to a level, winding passage, in which Avoosl Wuthoqquan began to overtake his elusive property once more; and hope flared high in his panting bosom.

The emeralds were almost within reach; then, with sleightful suddenness, they slipped from his ken beyond an abrupt angle of the passage; and following them, he paused in wonder, as if halted by an irresistible hand. He was half blinded for some moments by the pale, mysterious, bluish light that poured from the roof and walls of the huge cavern into which he had emerged; and he was more than dazzled by the multi-tinted splendor that flamed and glowed and glistened and sparkled at his very feet.

He stood on a narrow ledge of stone; and the whole chamber before and beneath him, almost to the level of this ledge, was filled with jewels even as a granary is filled with grain! It was as if all the rubies, opals, beryls, diamonds, amethysts, emeralds, chrysolites and sapphires of the world had been gathered together and poured into an immense pit. He thought that he saw his own emeralds, lying tranquilly and decorously in a nearer mound of the undulant mass; but there were so many others of like size and flawlessness that he could not be sure of them.

For awhile, he could hardly believe the ineffable vision. Then, with a single cry of ecstasy, he leapt forward from the ledge, sinking almost to his knees in the shifting and tinkling and billowing gems. In great double handfuls, he lifted the flaming and scintillating stones and let them sift between his fingers, slowly and voluptuously, to fall with a light clash on the monstrous heap. Blinking joyously, he watched the royal lights and colors run in spreading or narrowing ripples; he saw them burn like stedfast coals and secret stars, or leap out in blazing eyes that seemed to catch fire from each other.

In his most audacious dreams, the usurer had never even suspected the existence of such riches. He babbled aloud in a rhapsody of delight, as he played with

the numberless gems; and he failed to perceive that he was sinking deeper with every movement into the unfathomable pit. The jewels had risen above his knees, were engulfing his pudgy thighs, before his avaricious rapture was touched by any thought of peril.

Then, startled by the realization that he was sinking into his new-found wealth as into some treacherous quicksand, he sought to extricate himself and return to the safety of the ledge. He floundered helplessly; for the moving gems gave way beneath him, and he made no progress but went deeper still, till the bright, unstable heap had risen to his waist.

Avoosl Wuthoqquan began to feel a frantic terror amid the intolerable irony of his plight. He cried out; and as if in answer, there came a loud, unctuous, evil chuckle from the cavern behind him. Twisting his fat neck with painful effort, so that he could peer over his shoulder, he saw a most peculiar entity that was couching on a sort of shelf above the pit of jewels. The entity was wholly and outrageously unhuman; and neither did it resemble any species of animal, or any known god or demon of Hyperborea. Its aspect was not such as to lessen the alarm and panic of the money-lender; for it was very large and pale and squat, with a toad-like face and a swollen, squidgy body and numerous cuttlefish limbs or appendages. It lay flat on the shelf, with its chinless head and long slit-like mouth overhanging the pit, and its cold, lidless eyes peering obliquely at Avoosl Wuthoqquan. The usurer was not reassured when it began to speak in a thick and loathsome voice, like the molten tallow of corpses dripping from a wizard's kettle.

"Ho! what have we here?" it said. "By the black altar of Tsathoggua, 'tis a fat money-lender, wallowing in my jewels like a lost pig in a quagmire!"

"Help me!" cried Avoosl Wuthoqquan. "See you not that I am sinking?"

The entity gave its oleaginous chuckle. "Yes, I see your predicament, of course. . . . What are you doing here?"

"I came in search of my emeralds—two fine and flawless stones for which I have just paid the sum of two hundred *djals*."

"*Your* emeralds?" said the entity. "I fear that I must contradict you. The jewels are mine. They were stolen not long ago from this cavern, in which I have been wont to gather and guard my subterranean wealth for many ages. The thief was frightened away . . . when he saw me . . . and I suffered him to go. He had taken only the two emeralds; and I knew that they would return to me—as my jewels always return—whenever I choose to call them. The thief was lean and bony, and I did well to let him go; for now, in his place, there is a plump and well-fed usurer."

Avoosl Wuthoqquan, in his mounting terror, was barely able to comprehend the words or to grasp their implications. He had sunk slowly but steadily into the yielding pile; and green, yellow, red and violet gems were blinking gorgeously about his bosom and sifting with a light tinkle beneath his armpits.

"Help! help!" he wailed. "I shall be engulfed!"

Grinning sardonically, and showing the cloven tip of a fat white tongue, the singular entity slid from the shelf with boneless ease; and spreading its flat body on the pool of gems, into which it hardly sank, it slithered forward to a position from which it could reach the frantic usurer with its octopus-like members. It dragged him free with a single motion of incredible celerity. Then, without pause or preamble or further comment, in a leisurely and methodical fashion, it began to devour him.

Under the Eaves

By HELEN M. REID

To and fro, to and fro in the shadows swung the form of the dead man—a five-minute story

THUMP—thump—thump.

Spasmodically, above the wailing of the wind and the dismal battering of the rain against the windows, the ominous sound was repeated.

Thump—thump—thump.

Something was hitting against the side of the house—something heavy. Hannah rose uneasily and laid down her sewing. Susan would be coming for the dress in the morning, but she could not keep her mind on the stitches.

She thought resentfully of Judy. The ingrate! That was the thanks you got for twenty years of slaving. To be left alone with nothing to listen to but the wind and the rain and that hideous thumping.

For perhaps the twentieth time that night she pulled the shade back from one of the windows and stared out into the darkness. Thump—thump. The sound was close now, but beyond the window was an abyss of blackness in which she could see nothing. Shivering, she sat down once more in front of the grate, where a fire struggled fitfully against the fury of the storm without and the semi-darkness of the room within. In its wavering circle of light she sat erect and defiant, the flames outlining her sharp features and thin knot of graying hair.

It wasn't because she was getting old, she told herself sternly. A night like this would get on anybody's nerves. If Nate hadn't cleared out as he did—— She frowned impatiently.

"Where'd they a been without me, I'd like to know," she muttered. "And now they don't care what becomes o' me. Neither one o' them."

Anyway, thank goodness, the thumping had stopped. But what was that? Someone knocking? Who on earth would be venturing out in such a storm? But the knocking was repeated.

Resolutely she threw the door open. A rush of rain and wind blurred her vision for an instant, and in that instant a man pushed past her, a tall man, thin and somewhat stooped, with straggling gray hair that hung dripping about his seamed face; for in spite of the roughness of the night he wore no hat.

Hannah turned to face him; then abruptly she slammed the door shut and locked it.

"So you've come back to the old woman, have you?" She confronted him scornfully. "Found out nobody else would put up with you, I suppose."

He made no reply but settled himself in his favorite chair by the grate.

"That's right," she went on bitingly. "Make yourself comfortable. How you've got nerve to come back after walking out on me like you did I don't know."

"Seems to me you told me to walk out." His words were pleasant but disturbingly sarcastic. She noticed that his usual docility of manner was entirely gone.

"Better get on some dry clothes," she snapped. "You'll catch your death of cold."

A faintly sarcastic smile was his only reply. He made no movement, and for once she was at a loss what to say. She felt baffled and confused.

"You told me to go," he repeated, "and I went. Why do you blame me?"

She felt her face growing hot at the quiet rebuff.

"Blame you?" she retorted. "I blame you for being a shiftless, good-for-nothing fool, that's what. Look at Clem Hanks. You don't find him dilly-dallying his time away, and what's the result? He makes more money in a day than you'll ever make in a month. And if there's anything more useless than a man that can't make a decent living, I don't know what it is."

"You convinced me of that."

Something in his voice made her look at him intently. "Nate," she said slowly, "you know I don't mean things half as bad as I say them. If I'd a thought you had spunk enough to get out I'd a never told you to and that's God's truth."

She pointed to the sewing that lay where she had left it. "If it wasn't for the work Susan Hanks gives me to do I don't know how I'd keep body and soul together. Now you're back, maybe——"

"Won't Judy help?"

She fidgeted under the gaze of his steady eyes. "That girl——" She checked herself.

"Well?"

"She left after you did."

"Because——"

"Because she turned against her own mother, that's why. Didn't I do everything for her with my own hands? and now she takes sides with you. I'm sure I don't know why."

"Maybe I *was* of some use," he suggested.

"Land knows I'm glad enough you came back. I don't know what's come over me, but what with you gone and Judy gone, this place is like a tomb."

Thump—thump—thump. There it was again!

"I wish you'd see what that is," she said. "It gave me quite a turn when I was alone, but now you're here——"

The fire had burned low. Nate's chair seemed to have drawn back into the shadows.

"You won't mind, will you?" She was not in the habit of asking that question, but tonight seemed different.

Thump—thump—thump.

"Nate!"

A sudden flare from the dying fire illumined the room. Nate's chair was empty!

"Nate! Nate!" she called wildly.

The wind shrieked around the house in a paroxysm of fury. The rain lashed against the windows. There was no other answer.

Thump—thump.

A cold trembling seized her. She ran to the window and threw it open. Thump—thump. The thing was almost close enough for her to touch. She reached out. Her hand closed on a sodden sleeve, a man's arm. She screamed. The next instant she had swayed and fallen.

When she opened her eyes she was stretched out in bed with Susan Hanks bending over her.

"Clem heard you scream and came and got me to look after you," she explained.

"Is he—dead?"

Susan looked away. "Yes," she said.

"Can't they do—something?" There was a note of pleading in Hannah's harsh voice. "He was in here," she said. "I was talkin' to him just before I found him—out there."

Susan left the room quickly. Hannah heard her speaking to someone in a low voice. Then the words of Clem's reply came to her distinctly.

"Better send for Judy," he said. "She is delirious. Nate was hanging from those eaves all evening. The doctor says he's been dead for hours."

Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT-SHELLEY

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT WALTON, captain of a ship seeking a passage through the Arctic Ocean, saw a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass over the ice field to the north. In it sat a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature.

The next morning, after the ice had broken, he rescued from an ice-floe another man, greatly emaciated. Only one of his dogs remained alive, for he had been marooned for some time.

The man was Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, who related to Captain Walton the incredible story of his life and how he came to be on the ice-floe.

Frankenstein had lived in Geneva with his father and his adopted sister, Elizabeth, to whom he was betrothed. His father sent him to school at Ingolstadt with his chum, Henry Clerval. There he progressed in his studies of natural science to such a point that he learned to create life.

Without taking Clerval into his secret, in a garret room of the house where he lived he set about creating a monster, eight feet tall and human in appearance, taking his materials from graveyards, slaughter-houses and dissecting-rooms.

CHAPTER 5

IT WAS on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eyes of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flow-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May

ing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardor that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavoring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprized, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.

I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch —the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed downstairs.

I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.

I passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. Mingled with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!

Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned, and discovered to my sleepless and aching eyes the church of Ingolstadt, its white steeple and clock, which indicated the sixth hour. The porter opened the gates of the court, which had that night been my asylum, and I issued into the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my view. I did not dare return

to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky.

I CONTINUED walking in this manner for some time, endeavoring, by bodily exercise, to ease the load that weighed upon my mind. I traversed the streets, without any clear conception of where I was, or what I was doing. My heart palpitated in the sickness of fear; and I hurried on with irregular steps, not daring to look about me:

"Like one who, on a lonely road,
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And, having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread."

Continuing thus, I came at length opposite to the inn at which the various diligences and carriages usually stopped. Here I paused, I knew not why; but I remained some minutes with my eyes fixed on a coach that was coming toward me from the other end of the street. As it drew nearer, I observed that it was the Swiss diligence: it stopped just where I was standing, and, on the door being opened, I perceived Henry Clerval, who, on seeing me, instantly sprung out. "My dear Frankenstein," exclaimed he, "how glad I am to see you! How fortunate that you should be here at the very moment of my alighting!"

Nothing could equal my delight on seeing Clerval; his presence brought back to my thoughts my father, Elizabeth, and all those scenes of home so dear to my recollection. I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune; I felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months, calm and serene joy. I welcomed my friend, therefore, in the most cordial manner, and we walked towards my college.

Clerval continued talking for some time about our mutual friends, and his own good fortune in being permitted to come to Ingolstadt. "You may easily believe," said he, "how great was the difficulty to persuade my father that all necessary knowledge was not comprised in the noble art of bookkeeping; and, indeed, I believe I left him incredulous to the last, for his constant answer to my unwearied entreaties was the same as that of the Dutch schoolmaster in the *Vicar of Wakefield:* 'I have ten thousand florins a year without Greek, I eat heartily without Greek.' But his affection for me at length overcame his dislike of learning, and he has permitted me to undertake a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge."

"It gives me the greatest delight to see you; but tell me how you left my father, brothers, and Elizabeth."

"Very well, and very happy, only a little uneasy that they hear from you so seldom. By the by, I mean to lecture you a little upon their account myself. But, my dear Frankenstein," continued he, stopping short, and gazing full in my face, "I did not before remark how very ill you appear; so thin and pale; you look as if you had been watching for several nights."

"You have guessed right; I have lately been so deeply engaged in one occupation that I have not allowed myself sufficient rest, as you see: but I hope, I sincerely hope, that all these employments are now at an end, and that I am at length free."

I trembled excessively; I could not endure to think of, and far less to allude to, the occurrences of the preceding night. I walked with a quick pace, and we soon arrived at my college. I then reflected, and the thought made me shiver, that the creature whom I had left in my apartment might still be there, alive, and walking about. I dreaded to behold this monster; but I feared still more that Henry should see him. Entreating him, therefore, to

remain a few minutes at the bottom of the stairs, I darted up towards my own room.

My hand was already on the lock of the door before I recollected myself. I then paused; and a cold shivering came over me. I threw the door forcibly open, as children are accustomed to do when they expect a specter to stand in waiting for them on the other side; but nothing appeared. I stepped fearfully in: the apartment was empty; and my bedroom was also freed from its hideous guest. I could hardly believe that so great a good fortune could have befallen me; but when I became assured that my enemy had indeed fled, I clapped my hands for joy, and ran down to Clerval.

WE ASCENDED into my room, and the servant presently brought breakfast; but I was unable to contain myself. It was not joy only that possessed me; I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse beat rapidly. I was unable to remain for a single instant in the same place; I jumped over the chairs, clapped my hands, and laughed aloud. Clerval at first attributed my unusual spirits to joy on his arrival; but when he observed me more attentively he saw a wildness in my eyes for which he could not account; and my loud, unrestrained, heartless laughter, frightened and astonished him.

"My dear Victor," cried he, "what, for God's sake, is the matter? Do not laugh in that manner. How ill you are! What is the cause of all this?"

"Do not ask me," cried I, putting my hands before my eyes, for I thought I saw the dreaded specter glide into the room; "*he* can tell.—Oh, save me! save me!" I imagined that the monster seized me; I struggled furiously, and fell down in a fit.

Poor Clerval! what must have been his feelings? A meeting, which he anticipated with such joy, so strangely turned to bitterness. But I was not the witness of his grief; for I was lifeless, and did not recover my senses for a long, long time.

This was the commencement of a nervous fever, which confined me for several months. During all that time Henry was my only nurse. I afterwards learned that, knowing my father's advanced age, and unfitness for so long a journey, and how wretched my sickness would make Elizabeth, he spared them this grief by concealing the extent of my disorder. He knew that I could not have a more kind and attentive nurse than himself; and, firm in the hope he felt of my recovery, he did not doubt that, instead of doing harm, he performed the kindest action that he could toward them.

But I was in reality very ill; and surely nothing but the unbounded and unremitting attentions of my friend could have restored me to life. The form of the monster on whom I had bestowed existence was for ever before my eyes, and I raved incessantly concerning him. Doubtless my words surprized Henry: he at first believed them to be the wanderings of my disturbed imagination; but the pertinacity with which I continually recurred to the same subject, persuaded him that my disorder indeed owed its origin to some uncommon and terrible event.

By very slow degrees, and with frequent relapses that alarmed and grieved my friend, I recovered. I remember the first time I became capable of observing outward objects with any kind of pleasure, I perceived that the fallen leaves had disappeared, and that the young buds were shooting forth from the trees that shaded my window. It was a divine spring; and the season contributed greatly to my convalescence. I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in my bosom; my gloom disappeared, and in a short time I became as cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion.

"Dearest Clerval," exclaimed I, "how kind, how very good you are to me. This whole winter, instead of being spent in study, as you promised yourself, has been consumed in my sick room. How shall I ever repay you? I feel the greatest remorse for the disappointment of which I have been the occasion; but you will forgive me."

"You will repay me entirely, if you do not discompose yourself, but get well as fast as you can; and since you appear in such good spirits, I may speak to you on one subject, may I not?"

I trembled. One subject! what could it be? Could he allude to an object on whom I dared not even think?

"Compose yourself," said Clerval, who observed my change of color, "I will not mention it, if it agitates you; but your father and cousin would be very happy if they received a letter from you in your own handwriting. They hardly know how ill you have been, and are uneasy at your long silence."

"Is that all, my dear Henry? How could you suppose that my first thoughts would not fly towards those dear, dear friends whom I love, and who are so deserving of my love?"

"If this is your present temper, my friend, you will perhaps be glad to see a letter that has been lying here some days for you; it is from your cousin, I believe."

CHAPTER 6

CLERVAL then put the following letter into my hands. It was from my own Elizabeth:

"MY DEAREST COUSIN,—You have been ill, very ill, and even the constant letters of dear kind Henry are not sufficient to reassure me on your account. You are forbidden to write—to hold a pen; yet one word from you, dear Victor, is necessary to calm our apprehensions. For a long time I have thought that each post would bring this line, and my persuasions have restrained my uncle from undertaking a journey to Ingolstadt. I have prevented his encountering the inconveniences and perhaps dangers of so long a journey; yet how often have I regretted not being able to perform it myself! I figure to myself that the task of attending on your sick bed has devolved on some mercenary old nurse, who could never guess your wishes, nor minister to them with the care and affection of your poor cousin. Yet that is over now: Clerval writes that indeed you are getting better. I eagerly hope that you will confirm this intelligence soon in your own handwriting.

"Get well—and return to us. You will find a happy, cheerful home, and friends who love you dearly. Your father's health is vigorous, and he asks but to see you—but to be assured that you are well; and not a care will ever cloud his benevolent countenance. How pleased you would be to remark the improvement of our Ernest! He is now sixteen, and full of activity and spirit. He is desirous to be a true Swiss, and to enter into foreign service; but we can not part with him, at least until his elder brother returns to us. My uncle is not pleased with the idea of a military career in a distant country; but Ernest never had your powers of application. He looks upon study as an odious fetter; his time is spent in the open air, climbing the hills or rowing on the lake. I fear that he will become an idler unless we yield the point and permit him to enter on the profession which he has selected.

"Little alteration, except the growth of our dear children, has taken place since you left us. The blue lake, and snow-clad mountains, they never change; and I think our placid home and our contented hearts are regulated by the same immutable laws. My trifling occupations take

up my time and amuse me, and I am rewarded for any exertions by seeing none but happy, kind faces around me.

"Since you left us, but one change has taken place in our little household. Do you remember on what occasion Justine Moritz entered our family? Probably you do not; I will relate her history, therefore, in a few words. Madame Moritz, her mother, was a widow with four children, of whom Justine was the third. This girl had always been the favorite of her father; but, through a strange perversity, her mother could not endure her, and after the death of Monsieur Moritz, treated her very ill. My aunt observed this; and, when Justine was twelve years of age, prevailed on her mother to allow her to live at our house. The republican institutions of our country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which prevail in the great monarchies that surround it. Hence there is less distinction between the several classes of its inhabitants; and the lower orders, being neither so poor nor so despised, their manners are more refined and moral. A servant in Geneva does not mean the same thing as a servant in France and England. Justine, thus received in our family, learned the duties of a servant; a condition which, in our fortunate country, does not include the idea of ignorance, and a sacrifice of the dignity of a human being.

"Justine, you may remember, was a great favorite of yours; and I recollect you once remarked that if you were in an ill-humor, one glance from Justine could dissipate it, for the same reason that Ariosto gives concerning the beauty of Angelica —she looked so frank-hearted and happy. My aunt conceived a great attachment for her, by which she was induced to give her an education superior to that which she had at first intended. This benefit was fully repaid; Justine was the most grateful little creature in the world: I do not mean that she made any professions; I never heard one pass her lips; but you could see by her eyes that she almost adored her protectress. Although her disposition was gay, and in many respects inconsiderate, yet she paid the greatest attention to every gesture of my aunt. She thought her the model of all excellence, and endeavored to imitate her phraseology and manners, so that even now she often reminds me of her.

"When my dearest aunt died, every one was too much occupied in their own grief to notice poor Justine, who had attended her during her illness with the most anxious affection. Poor Justine was very ill; but other trials were reserved for her.

"One by one, her brothers and sister died; and her mother, with the exception of her neglected daughter, was left childless. The conscience of the woman was troubled; she began to think that the deaths of her favorites was a judgment from heaven to chastise her partiality. She was a Roman Catholic; and I believe her confessor confirmed the idea which she had conceived. Accordingly, a few months after your departure for Ingolstadt, Justine was called home by her repentant mother. Poor girl! she wept when she quitted our house; she was much altered since the death of my aunt; grief had given softness and a winning mildness to her manners, which had before been remarkable for vivacity. Nor was her residence at her mother's house of a nature to restore her gayety. The poor woman was very vacillating in her repentance. She sometimes begged Justine to forgive her unkindness, but much oftener accused her of having caused the deaths of her brothers and sister. Perpetual fretting at length threw Madame Moritz into a decline, which at first increased her irritability, but she is now at peace for ever. She died on the first

approach of cold weather, at the beginning of this last winter. Justine has returned to us; and I assure you I love her tenderly. She is very clever and gentle, and extremely pretty, as I mentioned before, her mien and her expressions continually remind me of my dear aunt.

"I must say also a few words to you, my dear cousin, of little darling William. I wish you could see him; he is very tall of his age, with sweet laughing blue eyes, dark eyelashes, and curling hair. When he smiles, two little dimples appear on each cheek, which are rosy with health. He has already had one or two little *wives*, but Louisa Biron is his favorite, a pretty little girl of five years of age.

"I have written myself into better spirits, dear cousin; but my anxiety returns upon me as I conclude. Write, dearest Victor—one line—one word will be a blessing to us. Ten thousand thanks to Henry for his kindness, his affection, and his many letters: we are sincerely grateful. Adieu! my cousin; take care of yourself; and, I entreat you, write!

ELIZABETH LAVENZA.

"GENEVA, *March 18th, 17—.*"

"DEAR, dear Elizabeth!" I exclaimed, when I had read her letter, "I will write instantly, and relieve them from the anxiety they must feel." I wrote, and this exertion greatly fatigued me; but my convalescence had commenced, and proceeded regularly. In another fortnight I was able to leave my chamber.

One of my first duties on my recovery was to introduce Clerval to the several professors of the university. In doing this, I underwent a kind of rough usage, ill befitting the wounds that my mind had sustained. Ever since the fatal night, the end of my labors, and the beginning of my misfortunes, I had conceived a violent antipathy even to the name of natural philosophy. When I was otherwise quite restored to health, the sight of a chemical instrument would renew all the agony of my nervous symptoms.

Henry saw this, and had removed all my apparatus from my view. He had also changed my apartment; for he perceived that I had acquired a dislike for the room which had previously been my laboratory. But these cares of Clerval were made of no avail when I visited the professors. Monsieur Waldman inflicted torture when he praised, with kindness and warmth, the astonishing progress I had made in the sciences. He soon perceived that I disliked the subject; but not guessing the real cause, he attributed my feelings to modesty, and changed the subject from my improvement, to the science itself, with a desire, as I evidently saw, of drawing me out. What could I do? He meant to please, and he tormented me. I felt as if he had placed carefully, one by one, in my view those instruments which were to be afterwards used in putting me to a slow and cruel death. I writhed under his words, yet dared not exhibit the pain I felt.

Clerval, whose eyes and feelings were always quick in discerning the sensations of others, declined the subject, alleging, in excuse, his total ignorance; and the conversation took a more general turn. I thanked my friend from my heart, but I did not speak. I saw plainly that he was surprized, but he never attempted to draw my secret from me; and although I loved him with a mixture of affection and reverence that knew no bounds, yet I could never persuade myself to confide to him that event which was so often present to my recollection, but which I feared the detail to another would only impress more deeply.

Monsieur Krempe was not equally docile; and in my condition at that time, of almost insupportable sensitiveness, his

harsh blunt encomiums gave me even more pain than the benevolent approbation of Monsieur Waldman. "Damn the fellow!" cried he; "why, Monsieur Clerval, I assure you he has outstript us all. Ay, stare if you please; but it is nevertheless true. A youngster who, but a few years ago, believed in Cornelius Agrippa as firmly as in the gospel, has now set himself at the head of the university; and if he is not soon pulled down, we shall all be out of countenance. Ay, ay," continued he, observing my face expressive of suffering, "Monsieur Frankenstein is modest; an excellent quality in a young man. Young men should be diffident of themselves, you know, Monsieur Clerval: I was myself when young; but that wears out in a very short time."

Monsieur Krempe had now commenced an eulogy on himself, which happily turned the conversation from a subject that was so annoying to me.

Clerval had never sympathized in my tastes for natural science; and his literary pursuits differed wholly from those which had occupied me. He came to the university with the design of making himself complete master of the oriental languages, as thus he should open a field for the plan of life he had marked out for himself. Resolved to pursue no inglorious career, he turned his eyes towards the East, as affording scope for his spirit of enterprise. The Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit languages engaged his attention, and I was easily induced to enter on the same studies.

Summer passed away in these occupations, and my return to Geneva was fixed for the latter end of autumn; but being delayed by several accidents, winter and snow arrived, the roads were deemed impassable, and my journey was retarded until the ensuing spring. I felt this delay very bitterly; for I longed to see my native town and my beloved friends. My return had only been delayed so long from an unwillingness to leave Clerval in a strange place, before he had become acquainted with any of its inhabitants. The winter, however, was spent cheerfully; and although the spring was uncommonly late, when it came its beauty compensated for its dilatoriness.

The month of May had already commenced, and I expected the letter daily which was to fix the date of my departure, when Henry proposed a pedestrian tour in the environs of Ingolstadt, that I might bid a personal farewell to the country I had so long inhabited. I acceded with pleasure to this proposition: I was fond of exercise, and Clerval had always been my favorite companion in the rambles of this nature that I had taken among the scenes of my native country.

We passed a fortnight in these perambulations: my health and spirits had long been restored, and they gained additional strength from the salubrious air I breathed, the natural incidents of our progress, and the conversation of my friend. Study had before secluded me from the intercourse of my fellow-creatures, and rendered me unsocial; but Clerval called forth the better feelings of my heart; he again taught me to love the aspect of nature, and the cheerful faces of children. Excellent friend! how sincerely did you love me, and endeavor to elevate my mind until it was on a level with your own! A selfish pursuit had cramped and narrowed me, until your gentleness and affection warmed and opened my senses; I became the same happy creature who, a few years ago, loved and beloved by all, had no sorrow or care. When happy, inanimate nature had the power of bestowing on me the most delightful sensations. A serene sky and verdant fields filled me with ecstasy. The present season was indeed divine; the flowers of spring bloomed in the hedges, while those of summer were already in bud. I was un-

disturbed by thoughts which during the preceding year had pressed upon me, notwithstanding my endeavors to throw them off, with an invincible burden.

Henry rejoiced in my gayety, and sincerely sympathized in my feelings: he exerted himself to amuse me, while he expressed the sensations that filled his soul. The resources of his mind on this occasion were truly astonishing: his conversation was full of imagination; and very often, in imitation of the Persian and Arabic writers, he invented tales of wonderful fancy and passion. At other times he repeated my favorite poems, or drew me out into arguments, which he supported with great ingenuity.

We returned to our college on a Sunday afternoon: the peasants were dancing, and every one we met appeared gay and happy. My own spirits were high, and I bounded along with feelings of unbridled joy and hilarity.

CHAPTER 7

On my return, I found the following letter from my father:

"My dear Victor,—You have probably waited impatiently for a letter to fix the date of your return to us; and I was at first tempted to write only a few lines, merely mentioning the day on which I should expect you. But that would be a cruel kindness, and I dare not do it. What would be your surprize, my son, when you expected a happy and glad welcome, to behold, on the contrary, tears and wretchedness? And how, Victor, can I relate our misfortune? Absence can not have rendered you callous to our joys and griefs; and how shall I inflict pain on my long absent son? I wish to prepare you for the woful news, but I know it is impossible; even now your eye skims over the page, to seek the words which are to convey to you the horrible tidings.

"William is dead!—that sweet child, whose smiles delighted and warmed my heart, who was so gentle, yet so gay! Victor, he is murdered!

"I will not attempt to console you; but will simply relate the circumstances of the transaction.

"Last Thursday (May 7th), I, my niece, and your two brothers, went to walk in Plainpalais. The evening was warm and serene, and we prolonged our walk farther than usual. It was already dusk before we thought of returning; and then we discovered that William and Ernest, who had gone on before, were not to be found. We accordingly rested on a seat until they should return. Presently Ernest came, and inquired if we had seen his brother: he said that he had been playing with him, that William had run away to hide himself, and that he vainly sought for him, and afterwards waited for him a long time, but that he did not return.

"This account rather alarmed us, and we continued to search for him until night fell, when Elizabeth conjectured that he might have returned to the house. He was not there. We returned again, with torches; for I could not rest, when I thought that my sweet boy had lost himself, and was exposed to all the damps and dews of night; Elizabeth also suffered extreme anguish. About five in the morning I discovered my lovely boy, whom the night before I had seen blooming and active in health, stretched on the grass livid and motionless: the print of the murderer's fingers was on his neck.

"He was conveyed home, and the anguish that was visible in my countenance betrayed the secret to Elizabeth. She was very earnest to see the corpse. At first I attempted to prevent her; but she persisted, and entering the room where it lay, hastily examined the neck of the victim, and clasping her hands exclaimed, 'O God! I have murdered my darling child!'

"She fainted, and was restored with extreme difficulty. When she again lived, it was only to weep and sigh. She told me that that same evening William had teased her to let him wear a very valuable miniature that she possessed of your mother. This picture is gone, and was doubtless the temptation which urged the murderer to the deed. We have no trace of him at present, although our exertions to discover him are unremitted; but they will not restore my beloved William!

"Come, dearest Victor; you alone can console Elizabeth. She weeps continually, and accuses herself unjustly as the cause of his death; her words pierce my heart. We are all unhappy; but will not that be an additional motive for you, my son, to return and be our comforter? Your dear mother! Alas, Victor! I now say, Thank God she did not live to witness the cruel, miserable death of her youngest darling!

"Come, Victor; not brooding thoughts of vengeance against the assassin, but with feelings of peace and gentleness, that will heal, instead of festering, the wounds of our minds. Enter the house of mourning, my friend, but with kindness and affection for those who love you, and not with hatred for your enemies.—Your affectionate and afflicted father,

ALPHONSE FRANKENSTEIN.

"GENEVA, *May 12th*, 17—."

Clerval, who had watched my countenance as I read this letter, was surprized to observe the despair that succeeded to the joy I at first expressed on receiving news from my friends. I threw the letter on the table, and covered my face with my hands.

"My dear Frankenstein," exclaimed Henry, when he perceived me weep with bitterness, "are you always to be unhappy? My dear friend, what has happened?"

I motioned to him to take up the letter, while I walked up and down the room in the extremest agitation. Tears also gushed from the eyes of Clerval, as he read the account of my misfortune.

"I can offer you no consolation, my friend," said he; "your disaster is irreparable. What do you intend to do?"

"To go instantly to Geneva: come with me, Henry, to order the horses."

IT WAS completely dark when I arrived in the environs of Geneva; the gates of the town were already shut; and I was obliged to pass the night at Secheron, a village at the distance of half a league from the city. The sky was serene; and, as I was unable to rest, I resolved to visit the spot where my poor William had been murdered.

As I could not pass through the town, I was obliged to cross the lake in a boat to arrive at Plainpalais. During this short voyage I saw the lightnings playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures. The storm appeared to approach rapidly; and, on landing, I ascended a low hill, that I might observe its progress. It advanced; the heavens were clouded, and I soon felt the rain coming slowly in large drops, but its violence quickly increased.

I quitted my seat, and walked on, although the darkness and storm increased every minute, and the thunder burst with a terrific crash over my head. It was echoed from Salêve, the Juras, and the Alps of Savoy; vivid flashes of lightning dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire; then for an instant everything seemed of a pitchy darkness, until the eye recovered itself from the preceding flash.

While I watched the tempest, so beautiful yet terrific, I wandered on with a hasty step. This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits; I clasped my hands, and exclaimed aloud, "William, dear angel! this is thy funeral, this thy dirge!"

As I said these words, I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently: I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy demon, to whom I had given life. What did he there? Could he be (I shuddered at the conception) the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth; my teeth chattered, and I was forced to lean against a tree for support.

The figure passed me quickly, and I lost it in the gloom. Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. *He* was the murderer! I could not doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact. I thought of pursuing the devil; but it would have been in vain, for another flash discovered him to me hanging among the rocks of the nearly perpendicular ascent of Mont Salêve, a hill that bounds Plainpalais on the south. He soon reached the summit, and disappeared.

I remained motionless. The thunder ceased; but the rain still continued, and the scene was enveloped in an impenetrable darkness. I revolved in my mind the events which I had until now sought to forget: the whole train of my progress towards the creation; the appearance of the work of my own hands alive at my bedside; its departure. Two years had now nearly elapsed since the night on which he first received life; and was this his first crime? Alas! I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery; had he not murdered my brother?

No one can conceive the anguish I suffered during the remainder of the night, which I spent, cold and wet, in the open air. But I did not feel the inconvenience of the weather; my imagination was busy in scenes of evil and despair. I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me.

Day dawned; and I directed my steps towards the town. The gates were open, and I hastened to my father's house. My first thought was to discover what I knew of the murderer, and cause instant pursuit to be made. But I paused when I reflected on the story that I had to tell. A being whom I myself had formed, and endued with life, had met me at midnight among the precipices of an inaccessible mountain. I remembered also the nervous fever with which I had been seized just at the time that I dated my creation, and which would give an air of delirium to a tale otherwise so utterly improbable. I well knew that if any other communicated such a relation to me, I should have looked upon it as the ravings of insanity. Besides, the strange nature of the animal would elude all pursuit, even if I were so far credited as to persuade my relatives to commence it. And then of what use would be the pursuit? Who could arrest a creature capable of scaling the overhanging sides of Mont Salêve? These reflections determined me, and I resolved to remain silent.

It was about five in the morning when I entered my father's house. I told the servants not to disturb the family, and went into the library to attend their usual hour of rising.

Six years had elapsed, passed as a dream but for one indelible trace, and I stood in the same place where I had last embraced

my father before my departure for Ingolstadt. Beloved and venerable parent! He still remained to me. I gazed on the picture of my mother, which stood over the mantelpiece. It was an historical subject, painted at my father's desire, and represented Caroline Beaufort in an agony of despair, kneeling by the coffin of her dead father. Her garb was rustic, and her cheek pale; but there was an air of dignity and beauty that hardly permitted the sentiment of pity. Below this picture was a miniature of William; and my tears flowed when I looked upon it.

While I was thus engaged, Ernest entered: he had heard me arrive, and hastened to welcome me. He expressed a sorrowful delight to see me: "Welcome, my dearest Victor," said he. "Ah! I wish you had come three months ago, and then you would have found us all joyous and delighted! You come to us now to share a misery which nothing can alleviate; yet your presence will, I hope, revive our father, who seems sinking under his misfortune; and your persuasions will induce poor Elizabeth to cease her vain and tormenting self-accusations.—Poor William! he was our darling and our pride!"

Tears, unrestrained, fell from my brother's eyes; a sense of mortal agony crept over my frame. Before, I had only imagined the wretchedness of my desolated home; the reality came on me as a new, and a not less terrible, disaster. I tried to calm Ernest; I inquired more minutely concerning my father and her I named my cousin.

"She most of all," said Ernest, "requires consolation; she accused herself of having caused the death of my brother, and that made her very wretched. But since the murderer has been discovered——"

"The murderer discovered! Good God! how can that be? who could attempt to pursue him? It is impossible; one might as well try to overtake the winds, or confine a mountain-stream with a straw. I saw him too; he was free last night!"

"I do not know what you mean," replied my brother, in accents of wonder, "but to us the discovery we have made completes our misery. No one would believe it at first; and even now Elizabeth will not be convinced, notwithstanding all the evidence. Indeed, who would credit that Justine Moritz, who was so amiable, and fond of all the family, could suddenly become capable of so frightful, so appalling a crime?"

"Justine Moritz! Poor, poor girl, is she the accused? But it is wrongfully; every one knows that; no one believes it, surely, Ernest?"

"No one did at first; but several circumstances came out, that have almost forced conviction upon us; and her own behavior has been so confused, as to add to the evidence of facts a weight that, I fear, leaves no hope for doubt. But she will be tried today, and you will then hear all."

He related that, the morning on which the murder of poor William had been discovered, Justine had been taken ill, and confined to her bed for several days. During this interval, one of the servants, happening to examine the apparel she had worn on the night of the murder, had discovered in her pocket the picture of my mother, which had been judged to be the temptation of the murderer. The servant instantly showed it to one of the others, who, without saying a word to any of the family, went to a magistrate; and, upon their deposition, Justine was apprehended. On being charged with the fact, the poor girl confirmed the suspicion in a great measure by her extreme confusion of manner.

This was a strange tale, but it did not shake my faith; and I replied earnestly, "You are all mistaken; I know the murderer. Justine, poor, good Justine, is innocent."

At that instant my father entered. I saw unhappiness deeply impressed on his countenance, but he endeavored to welcome me cheerfully; and, after we had exchanged our mournful greeting, would have introduced some other topic than that of our disaster, had not Ernest exclaimed, "Good God, papa! Victor says that he knows who was the murderer of poor William."

"We do also, unfortunately," replied my father; "for indeed I had rather have been for ever ignorant than have discovered so much depravity and ingratitude in one I valued so highly."

"My dear father, you are mistaken; Justine is innocent."

"If she is, God forbid that she should suffer as guilty. She is to be tried today, and I hope, I sincerely hope, that she will be acquitted."

This speech calmed me. I was firmly convinced in my own mind that Justine, and indeed every human being, was guiltless of this murder. I had no fear, therefore, that any circumstantial evidence could be brought forward strong enough to convict her. My tale was not one to announce publicly; its astounding horror would be looked upon as madness by the vulgar. Did any one indeed exist, except me, the creator, who would believe, unless his senses convinced him, in the existence of the living monument of presumption and rash ignorance which I had let loose upon the world?

We were soon joined by Elizabeth. Time had altered her since I last beheld her; it had endowed her with loveliness surpassing the beauty of her childish years. There was the same candor, the same vivacity, but it was allied to an expression more full of sensibility and intellect. She welcomed me with the greatest affection. "Your arrival, my dear cousin," said she, "fills me with hope. You perhaps will find some means to justify my poor guiltless Justine. Alas! who is safe, if she be convicted of crime? I rely on her innocence as certainly as I do upon my own. Our misfortune is doubly hard to us; we have not only lost that lovely darling boy, but this poor girl, whom I sincerely love, is to be torn away by even a worse fate. If she is condemned, I never shall know joy more. But she will not, I am sure she will not; and then I shall be happy again, even after the sad death of my little William."

CHAPTER 8

We passed a few sad hours, until eleven o'clock, when the trial was to commence. My father and the rest of the family being obliged to attend as witnesses, I accompanied them to the court.

During the whole of this wretched mockery of justice I suffered living torture. It was to be decided whether the result of my curiosity and lawless devices would cause the death of two of my fellow-beings: one a smiling babe, full of innocence and joy; the other far more dreadfully murdered, with every aggravation of infamy that could make the murder memorable in horror. Justine also was a girl of merit, and possessed qualities which promised to render her life happy: now all was to be obliterated in an ignominious grave; and I the cause! A thousand times rather would I have confessed myself guilty of the crime ascribed to Justine; but I was absent when it was committed, and such a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman, and would not have exculpated her who suffered through me.

The appearance of Justine was calm. She was dressed in mourning; and her countenance, always engaging, was rendered, by the solemnity of her feelings, exquisitely beautiful. Yet she appeared confident in innocence, and did not tremble, although gazed on and execrated

by thousands; for all the kindness which her beauty might otherwise have excited was obliterated in the minds of the spectators by the imagination of the enormity she was supposed to have committed. She was tranquil, yet her tranquillity was evidently constrained; and as her confusion had before been adduced as a proof of her guilt, she worked up her mind to an appearance of courage. When she entered the court, she threw her eyes round it, and quickly discovered where we were seated. A tear seemed to dim her eye when she saw us; but she quickly recovered herself, and a look of sorrowful affection seemed to attest her utter guiltlessness.

The trial began; and, after the advocate against her had stated the charge, several witnesses were called. Several strange facts combined against her, which might have staggered any one who had not such proof of her innocence as I had. She had been out the whole of the night on which the murder had been committed, and towards morning had been perceived by a market-woman not far from the spot where the body of the murdered child had been afterwards found. The woman asked her what she did there; but she looked very strangely, and only returned a confused and unintelligible answer. She returned to the house about eight o'clock; and, when one inquired where she had passed the night, she replied that she had been looking for the child, and demanded earnestly if anything had been heard concerning him. When shown the body, she fell into violent hysterics, and kept her bed for several days. The picture was then produced, which the servant had found in her pocket; and when Elizabeth, in a faltering voice, proved that it was the same which, an hour before the child had been missed, she had placed round his neck, a murmur of horror and indignation filled the court.

Justine was called on for her defense. As the trial had proceeded, her countenance had altered. Surprize, horror, and misery were strongly expressed. Sometimes she struggled with her tears; but, when she was desired to plead, she collected her powers, and spoke, in an audible, although variable voice.

"God knows," she said, "how entirely I am innocent. But I do not pretend that my protestations should acquit me: I rest my innocence on a plain and simple explanation of the facts which have been adduced against me; and I hope the character I have always borne will incline my judges to a favorable interpretation, where any circumstance appears doubtful or suspicious."

She then related that, by the permission of Elizabeth, she had passed the evening of the night on which the murder had been committed at the house of an aunt at Chêne, a village situated at about a league from Geneva. On her return, at about nine o'clock, she met a man, who asked her if she had seen anything of the child who was lost. She was alarmed by this account, and passed several hours in looking for him, when the gates of Geneva were shut, and she was forced to remain several hours of the night in a barn belonging to a cottage, being unwilling to call up the inhabitants, to whom she was well known. Most of the night she spent here watching; towards morning she believed that she slept for a few minutes; some steps disturbed her, and she awoke. It was dawn, and she quitted her asylum, that she might again endeavor to find my brother. If she had gone near the spot where his body lay, it was without her knowledge. That she had been bewildered when questioned by the market-woman was not surprizing, since she had passed a sleepless night, and the fate of poor William was yet uncertain. Con-

cerning the picture she could give no account.

"I know," continued the unhappy victim, "how heavily and fatally this one circumstance weighs against me, but I have no power of explaining it; and when I have expressed my utter ignorance, I am only left to conjecture concerning the probabilities by which it might have been placed in my pocket. But here also I am checked. I believe that I have no enemy on earth, and none surely would have been so wicked as to destroy me wantonly. Did the murderer place it there? I know of no opportunity afforded him for so doing; or, if I had, why should he have stolen the jewel, to part with it again so soon?

"I commit my cause to the justice of my judges, yet I see no room for hope. I beg permission to have a few witnesses examined concerning my character; and if their testimony shall not overweigh my supposed guilt, I must be condemned, although I would pledge my salvation on my innocence."

Several witnesses were called, who had known her for many years, and they spoke well of her; but fear and hatred of the crime of which they supposed her guilty rendered them timorous, and unwilling to come forward.

My own agitation and anguish was extreme during the whole trial. I believed in her innocence; I knew it. Could the demon, who had (I did not for a minute doubt) murdered my brother, also in his hellish sport have betrayed the innocent to death and ignominy? I could not sustain the horror of my situation; and when I perceived that the popular voice, and the countenances of the judges, had already condemned my unhappy victim, I rushed out of court in agony. The tortures of the accused did not equal mine; she was sustained by innocence, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom, and would not forego their hold.

I PASSED a night of unmingled wretchedness. In the morning I went to the court; my lips and throat were parched. I dared not ask the fatal question; but I was known, and the officer guessed the cause of my visit. The ballots had been thrown; they were all black, and Justine was condemned.

I can not pretend to describe what I then felt. I had before experienced sensations of horror; and I have endeavored to bestow upon them adequate expressions, but words can not convey an idea of the heart-sickening despair that I then endured. The person to whom I addressed myself added that Justine had already confessed her guilt. "That evidence," he observed, "was hardly required in so glaring a case, but I am glad of it; and, indeed, none of our judges like to condemn a criminal upon circumstantial evidence, be it ever so decisive."

This was strange and unexpected intelligence; what could it mean? Had my eyes deceived me? And was I really as mad as the whole world would believe me to be, if I disclosed the object of my suspicions? I hastened to return home, and Elizabeth eagerly demanded the result.

"My cousin," replied I, "it is decided as you may have expected; all judges had rather that ten innocent should suffer, than that one guilty should escape. But she has confessed."

This was a dire blow to poor Elizabeth, who had relied with firmness upon Justine's innocence. "Alas!" said she, "how shall I ever again believe in human goodness? Justine, whom I loved and esteemed as my sister, how could she put on those smiles of innocence only to betray? Her mild eyes seemed incapable of any severity or guile, and yet she has committed a murder."

Soon after we heard that the poor victim had expressed a desire to see my cousin. My father wished her not to go; but said that he left it to her own judgment and feelings to decide. "Yes," said Elizabeth, "I will go, although she is guilty; and you, Victor, shall accompany me: I can not go alone."

The idea of this visit was torture to me, yet I could not refuse.

WE ENTERED the gloomy prison-chamber, and beheld Justine sitting on some straw at the farther end; her hands were manacled, and her head rested on her knees. She rose on seeing us enter; and when we were left alone with her, she threw herself at the feet of Elizabeth, weeping bitterly. My cousin wept also.

"Oh, Justine!" said she, "why did you rob me of my last consolation? I relied on your innocence; and although I was then very wretched, I was not so miserable as I am now."

"And do you also believe that I am so very, very wicked? Do you also join with my enemies to crush me, to condemn me as a murderer?" Her voice was suffocated with sobs.

"Rise, my poor girl," said Elizabeth, "why do you kneel, if you are innocent? I am not one of your enemies; I believed you guiltless, nothwithstanding every evidence, until I heard that you had yourself declared your guilt. That report, you say, is false; and be assured, dear Justine, that nothing can shake my confidence in you for a moment, but your own confession."

"I did confess; but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins. The God of heaven forgive me! Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hellfire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition. What could I do? In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable."

She paused, weeping, and then continued—"I thought with horror, my sweet lady, that you should believe your Justine, whom your blessed aunt had so highly honored, and whom you loved, was a creature capable of a crime which none but the devil himself could have perpetrated. Dear William! dearest blessed child! I soon shall see you again in heaven, where we shall all be happy; and that consoles me, going as I am to suffer ignominy and death."

"Oh, Justine! forgive me for having for one moment distrusted you. Why did you confess? But do not mourn, dear girl. Do not fear. I will proclaim, I will prove your innocence. I will melt the stony hearts of your enemies by my tears and prayers. You shall not die!—You, my playfellow, my companion, my sister, perish on the scaffold! No! no! I never could survive so horrible a misfortune."

Justine shook her head mournfully. "I do not fear to die," she said; "that pang is past. God raises my weakness, and gives me courage to endure the worst. I leave a sad and bitter world; and if you remember me, and think of me as of one unjustly condemned, I am resigned to the fate awaiting me. Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to the will of Heaven!"

DURING this conversation I had retired to a corner of the prison-room, where I could conceal the horrid anguish that possessed me. Despair! Who dared talk of that? The poor victim, who on the morrow was to pass the awful boundary

(Please turn to page 862)

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 724)

long out of print. Witness these characteristic titles: *Jewel of Seven Stars, Lair of the White Worm, Lady of the Shroud, Mystery of the Sea.* Was *Dracula's Guest,* which you published in WEIRD TALES some years back, a part of the book of that same title? If so, could the rest be published instead of the original *Dracula?*" [*Dracula's Guest* was written by Stoker as part of his novel *Dracula,* but was omitted from *Dracula* because of the great length that novel had already reached. It was reprinted in WEIRD TALES in the issue of December, 1927.—THE EDITORS.]

Writes W. W. Green, Jr., of Washington, Kansas: "I was elated to see in the April issue that you are going to publish *Frankenstein.* I have been thinking ever since that famous talkie was released that if WEIRD TALES would print that story it would be just about right. And I don't think very many readers would kick if you printed *Dracula.*"

A letter from Glenn Smith, of Chicago, says: "I've read your WEIRD TALES since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. I've relished it with greater pleasure with my increasing years. Through it I acquired the incentive to inquire at the public library about other writers of weird tales of the past. Thus I became a lover of the writings of such as Poe, Bierce, and all the others, as well as our moderns, Blackwood and Machen. I am writing to say I hope you discontinue your policy of reprinting weird fiction that anybody can get at the public library. I regard it as a waste of space; for who is there who can't go to the library to get *Dracula* or *Frankenstein,* and such? If you must reprint, I suggest reprinting the inimitable stories that modern writers have written for WEIRD TALES itself. One of the greatest novels I've read in your pages was *On the Dead Man's Chest,* by Eli Colter."

Linus Hogenmiller, of Farmington, Missouri, writes to the Eyrie: "Let me voice the plea of myself and many others in asking most insistently that you publish *Dracula* after *Frankenstein* is completed. Certainly even those who have read it will be glad to see it again in WEIRD TALES. Give us some good German and French weird stories, and publish serially some long reprints of the cream of weird tales from over the globe. I am only one of those late readers who have never read Lovecraft's earlier masterpieces. Are you going to reprint them and other equally famous classics of weird lore?"

"I was pleasantly surprized by the announcement that you were going to reprint *Frankenstein,*" writes Frederick B. Shroyer, of Decatur, Indiana. "Why not, after this story comes to an end, keep up the good work and print another scientific masterpiece of the past? I am sure they would be received with enthusiasm by your readers."

"I am not in favor of having reprints," writes Hyman Vinunsky, of Cleveland. "You see, I've read these reprint stories before they were put in WEIRD TALES. I have read them in books taken from the library in my city. I've already read *Frankenstein* and *Dracula.* So why should I read over reprints when I've read them before? I say put in an original new story in place of the reprint."

Warren Greenspan, of Yonkers, New York, writes: "I see that you are won-

dering what to do about reprints. I think that the readers would rather have reprints from back issues of WEIRD TALES rather than elsewhere. I can easily get *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* in book form. Many of your new readers would like reprints from WEIRD TALES. Some reprints I would like to see soon are: *The Bird People* and *The Bride of Osiris,* both by Otis Adelbert Kline (his *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* was a rattling good story), and *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt."

Writes Donald Allgeier, of Mountain Grove, Missouri: "I am one of the unfortunates who have never read either *Dracula* or *Frankenstein.* Not only that, but our local theater has never shown the picturized version. Thus it is that I hail the coming of *Frankenstein* to your magazine with great delight, and hope you will follow it up with *Dracula* and others. Your reprint department is one of the most interesting features of your magazine."

Emil Petaja, of Milltown, Montana, writes: "I am very glad to hear that you are going to publish *Frankenstein* in the reprints; but I do hope that you will not publish *Dracula,* as I have read it, and I think that most of the readers of WEIRD TALES have also. I think it would be a good plan to publish stories out of back issues of WEIRD TALES in the reprints, as new readers will enjoy reading stories by their favorite authors."

"*The Wolf-Leader* by Alexandre Dumas proved to be one of the best weird tales I have ever read," writes D. A. Arnone, of Jamestown, New York. "But *The Devil's Bride,* by Mr. Quinn, is so far the best story that has ever been printed in WEIRD TALES. As for *Frankenstein* and *Dracula,* they are fine stories, but not for reprints."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? Lovecraft's graveyard tale, *In the Vault,* is in a close struggle with the third installment of Seabury Quinn's novel, *The Devil's Bride,* for first place in popularity among all the stories in our April issue, with Nictzin Dyalhis' story, *The Red Witch,* close behind.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JUNE WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

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It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Coming Next Month

ON THE floor lay Don's body. It looked like that of a dead man. To all appearance there was no life in it. Don did not seem to be breathing, and his face had the yellow, waxen color of death. Godfrey Moore spurned the body with his foot and laughed.

"He's dead!" exclaimed Abner Wells. The scholar, the elegant "blue-stocking," had a horror of death, especially of the sight of a dead person, that he had never been able to overcome.

"Not dead, but sleeping," laughed Moore. "No, my dear Abner, Wentworth's soul is still attached to the body by a tenuous bond, and very much bewildered just at present. However, by the time I have need of it, it will be sufficiently awake for my purposes."

"And the girl?" stammered Abner.

"Ah, she is in the same condition in a room upstairs. Would you like to have a look at her? No? I find that I can best command the presence of our friend West when her astral is entirely removed, like Wentworth's. In fact, I am thinking of sending West to assist Wentworth in the killing I have planned, for Wentworth is unusually obtuse, and West will be a very willing counsellor."

"How—how are you going to do it?"

"I shall send Wentworth's astral to an apartment, where he will leave astral counterparts of his fingerprints all over the place. He will kill a certain man by the explosion of a certain amount of psychic force and rob the place of any valuables of a portable nature.

"Meanwhile I shall revive Wentworth, reunite his soul to his body, and send him into Cannonville, somewhat dazed, to be picked up by the police. Come, let us see what the Akashic mirror says." . . .

This astounding novel of Black Magic, eery murders, and the kingdom of shadows, with its breath-taking events and its swift movement, will begin in next month's issue. Don't fail to read it.

The Phantom Hand

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The story of a writer of gangster tales whose villainous creation threatened to loose a dreadful horror upon the world.

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A strange thrill-tale of the leopard-men of Africa—a shuddery story of a weird horror.

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Ants—droves of them—as big as panthers—ants that made slaves of men and threatened civilization with destruction.

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The strange story of a man from Earth on a planet which was inhabited solely by beautiful women.

Also, the smashing conclusion of Seabury Quinn's fascinating serial, THE DEVIL'S BRIDE, and another thrilling installment of FRANKENSTEIN.

July WEIRD TALES Out June 1

Frankenstein

(Continued from page 858)

between life and death, felt not as I did, such deep and bitter agony. I gnashed my teeth, and ground them together, uttering a groan that came from my inmost soul. Justine started. When she saw who it was, she approached me, and said, "Dear sir, you are very kind to visit me; you, I hope, do not believe that I am guilty?"

I could not answer. "No, Justine," said Elizabeth; "he is more convinced of your innocence than I was; for even when he heard that you had confessed, he did not credit it."

"I truly thank him. In these last moments I feel the sincerest gratitude towards those who think of me with kindness. How sweet is the affection of others to such a wretch as I am! It removes more than half my misfortune; and I feel as if I could die in peace, now that my innocence is acknowledged by you, dear lady, and your cousin."

Thus the poor sufferer tried to comfort others and herself. She indeed gained the resignation she desired. But I, the true murderer, felt the never-dying worm alive in my bosom, which allowed of no hope or consolation. Elizabeth also wept, and was unhappy; but hers also was the misery of innocence, which, like a cloud that passes over the fair moon, for a while hides but can not tarnish its brightness. Anguish and despair had penetrated into the core of my heart; I bore a hell within me, which nothing could extinguish.

We stayed several hours with Justine; and it was with great difficulty that Elizabeth could tear herself away. "I wish," cried she, "that I were to die with you; I can not live in this world of misery."

Justine assumed an air of cheerfulness, while she with difficulty repressed her bitter tears. She embraced Elizabeth, and

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for April 1, 1932.

State of Illinois }
County of Cook } ss.

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Wm. R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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George H. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

P. W. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is_____ (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23d day of March, 1932. RICHARD S. GOULDEN,
[SEAL] Notary Public.
My commission expires May 3, 1934.

said, in a voice of half-suppressed emotion, "Farewell, sweet lady, dearest Elizabeth, my beloved and only friend; may Heaven, in its bounty, bless and preserve you; may this be the last misfortune that you will ever suffer! Live, and be happy, and make others so."

And on the morrow Justine died. Elizabeth's heartrending eloquence failed to move the judges from their settled conviction in the criminality of the saintly sufferer. My passionate and indignant appeals were lost upon them. And when I received their cold answers, and heard the harsh unfeeling reasoning of these men, my purposed avowal died away on my lips. Thus I might proclaim myself a madman, but not revoke the sentence passed upon my wretched victim. She perished on the scaffold as a murderess!

From the tortures of my own heart, I turned to contemplate the deep and voiceless grief of my Elizabeth. This also was my doing! And my father's wo, and the desolation of that late so smiling home—all was the work of my thrice-accursed hands! Ye weep, unhappy ones; but these

(Continued on next page)

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are not your last tears! Again shall you raise the funeral wail, and the sound of your lamentations shall again and again be heard! Frankenstein, your son, your kinsman, your early, much-loved friend; he who would spend each vital drop of blood for your sakes—who has no thought nor sense of joy, except as it is mirrored also in your dear countenances—who would fill the air with blessings, and spend his life in serving you—he bids you weep—to shed countless tears; happy beyond his hopes, if thus inexorable fate be satisfied, and if the destruction pause before the peace of the grave have succeeded to your sad torments!

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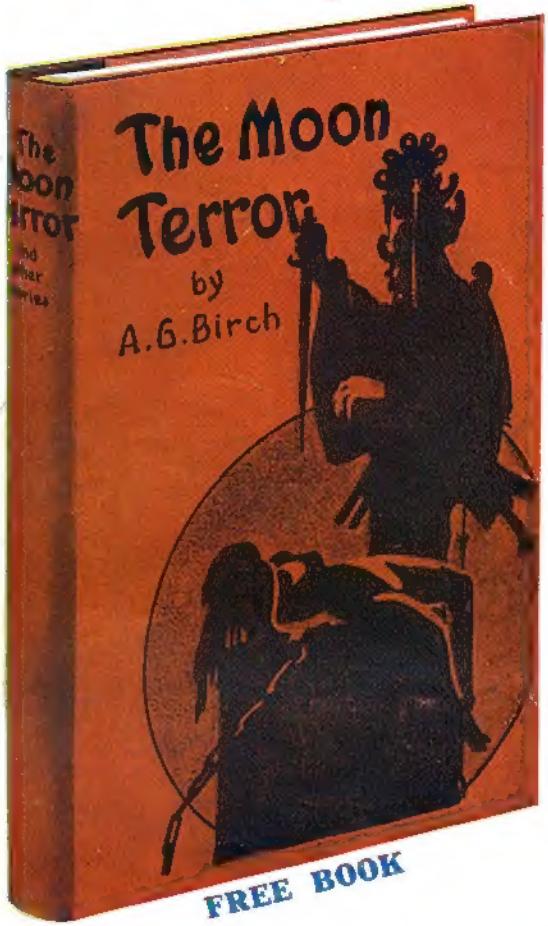

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